

New

History of the Occult

Uncover arcane knowledge and enigmatic occultists

From the
makers of
ALL ABOUT
HISTORY

DISPLAY UNTIL 12/11/23 US \$13.99



34>

25274 16252

YES OUIJA NO

THE PREDICTING ORACLE

C D E F G H I J K L
S T U V W X

Centennial Specials

Demons * Voodoo * Séances * Esoteric cults * Folk magic * Kabbalah

Welcome to

HISTORY *of the* OCCULT

Knowledge of the occult is knowledge of the unmeasurable; the paranormal, the spiritual, and the arcane. Its origins are shrouded in mystery. History of the Occult delves deep into the past to investigate the hidden history of all things cryptic, mystic and other-worldly. Read about the lives of famous and controversial occultists, from Nostradamus, hailed by many as a prophet, to Aleister Crowley, denounced in the popular press as "the wickedest man in the world". Uncover why séances became so popular, how tarot cards could divine a person's future and the mythic origins of the occult's most influential practitioners, Hermes Trismegistus, whose spells and teachings have spread worldwide. Discover the runes, rituals and star signs behind the rise and fall of Hitler's Third Reich and immerse yourself in the mysterious world of voodoo and the famous healer who became New Orleans' most famous practitioner of the supposedly dark art. Packed with incredible illustrations and insights, this is the perfect guide for believers and sceptics alike.





Thoth, magic, and Hermes Trismegistus

A mythical figure. An ancient prophet. The figure of Hermes Trismegistus is shrouded in mystery, but where did the founder of Hermeticism really come from?

Written by **Dee Dee Chainey**

The Egyptian god Thoth depicted as a baboon, now located in the Louvre (Paris)

Hermes Trismegistus is a mystical figure revered by many as an ancient prophet who shared his knowledge of alchemy and the occult sciences through his writings in the ancient world. To uncover the truth of this figure, we must look back to the furthest reaches of ancient Egyptian myth, to draw together the seeds of the legends that became a man.

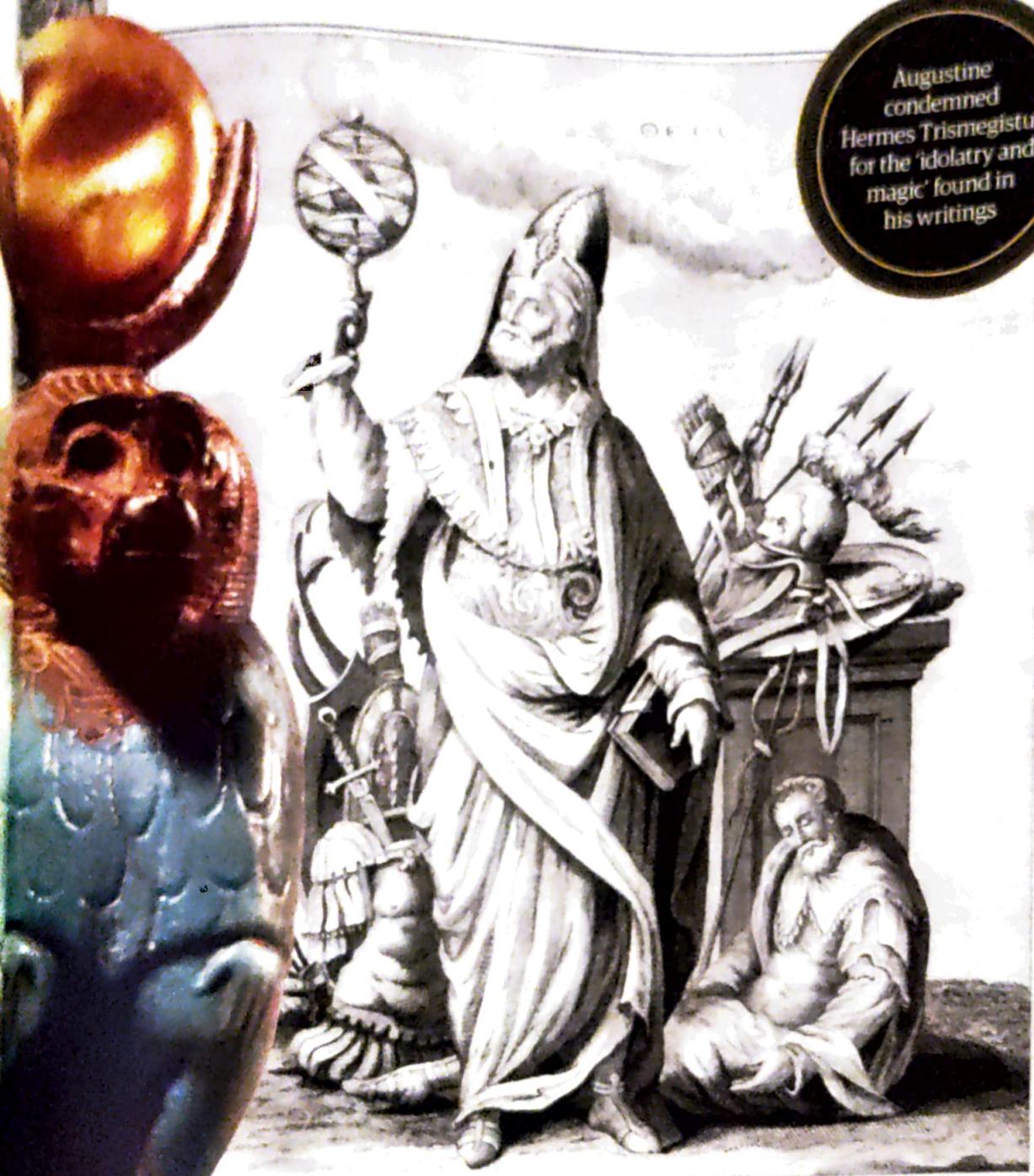
Ritual and religion pervaded every part of life in ancient Egypt. A plethora of exotic and unusual gods and goddesses made up their diverse pantheon, worshipped as masters of the natural world. While gods were many, worship in this ancient religion focused on the

king as an intermediary between the people and the divine, yet ancient texts hidden for centuries in tombs and secreted underground have now been unearthed. These texts show how people beseeched the gods and gave offerings up to them, to ask for their blessing and help in all things. These gods ruled over natural phenomena, the astral bodies, and aspects of daily life. Each deity was seen as an unknowable force, so depicted symbolically in ancient art, with different animals, objects and signs to represent these characteristics, and convey the true nature of the god. During the Middle Kingdom golden age, Osiris the god of the dead was one of the most important deities of the pantheon. Others included Isis, who

offered help to the dead, and ruled magical healing and protection. She is linked with baking, weaving and brewing. Associated with the sky, Horus was a falcon-headed god, with the Moon as his left eye and the Sun as his right. Linked with Horus, and too having the falcon as a symbol is Ra, a creator god, who would travel across the sky each day in his barge, carrying the Sun; at night he would travel to the underworld, hence explaining darkness to everyone who knew this myth.

From the Old Kingdom (c. 3700 to 2150 BCE) onwards, Thoth was a god of wisdom, writing and hieroglyphs, as well as

Augustine
condemned
Hermes Trismegistus
for the 'idolatry and
magic' found in
his writings



HERCVRIVS TRIMEGISTVS

Hermes Trismegistus, pictured
under the Greek word 'theos' or god,
with the caduceus at his side

Gods of writing and magic

Gods of words and writing are often also gods of magic. Up until the Greek culture pervaded Egyptian life, writing and literacy were considered secret knowledge kept only for priests and scribes. Thoth was often considered to have created writing and languages as the scribe of the gods, a responsibility shared with the goddess Seshat, seen as the 'lord of books'; he was a powerful word-smith. Many gods linked to the art of writing are also gods of magic. Odin, the chief god of Norse mythology, was a god of wisdom, healing and magic, and credited with uncovering the wisdom of the runes. He was said to practice the secret art of seiðr magic and sorcery, and was the god who uncovered the wisdom of the runes by hanging himself from the branches of the World Tree, Yggdrasil. He also pierced himself with a spear as a sacrifice, in order to call up the runes from the well of the Norns (or Fates). Runes formed the alphabet used by the Vikings for writing magical charms, once more showing a link between writing, moving between the worlds, and magic—the same powers wielded by Thoth.

The Norse Allfather, Odin, made a sacrifice to uncover the secrets of the runes from the Well of Urðr



"Gods could be combined into a composite deity"

Knowledge and calculations, and was very much thought to maintain equilibrium within the universe. Said to stand at the side of Ra's solar barge as it travelled across the sky, his wife Maat stood on the opposing side. Thoth played an important role in Egyptian mythology, and while his worship was most prominent in the city of Khemenu (called Hermopolis by the Greeks, the City of Hermes or the City of the Sun God), he was worshipped in many areas of Egypt. The figure of Thoth developed greatly over time, and he later became a mediator between the deities, overseeing battles between good and evil, as well as becoming associated with magic, religion, philosophy and science, and was credited with giving movement to the astral bodies.

The role of the gods in ancient Egypt differs somewhat to gods in other traditions. The Egyptians did not just tell stories to explain the world, but expressed their views of the reality through the relationship between divine forces and how they interact, enter the gods. Each deity represented an area of divinity or force, rather than being seen as individual entities in the same way as people. Gods could be combined into a composite deity, becoming an amalgam of forces and symbolism. Sometimes one god was even said to exist within another deity, when one deity displayed the tendencies of another god, or took on

a similar role. Often the gods would be grouped by shared traits, although others combined to highlight how some forces opposed others. One example of this is Amun—the invisible all pervading creator-being combined with Ra—the god of the Sun and source of all its power and energy—to create Amun-Ra, who bridged both of these aspects. Thoth is linked to the Moon, and one specific aspect of himself is the moon god Iah-Djehuty; he is sometimes depicted with a

Hermopolis, the 'City of Hermes', once called Khemenu by the Egyptians, was a center of worship of both Thoth and Hermes

crescent moon and lunar disk on his head because of this association. In this form, he appears as a man with the head of an ibis, with a focus of commanding times and seasons. He takes the head of a baboon when his focus is equilibrium and balance, as the god Aân. As Sheps he takes the head of a hawk, as Mendes the head of a bull. When depicted in more general terms, he takes the form of an ibis entirely. He is seen as a self-created god, who calculated the creation of the heavens, and indeed as the tongue and very heart of Ra, directing the solar barge across the skies, giving Rational reasoning and the speech with which to enact his will.

By the 12th century BCE, Egypt had faced centuries of unrest and battle against the Hittites, and political chaos ensued. It never truly regained its strength. A wave of Hellenisation reached the shores of Egypt by the end of the 4th century BCE, after the conquest of Alexander the Great. The Egyptian people resisted as Ptolemy, a Macedonian Greek general, was instated as king, modelling himself on the Egyptian pharaohs of old. The new Greek ideals entering the country after the conquest had a profound impact on Egyptian religious life. King Ptolemy I introduced the worship of new gods in order to

One of the roles of Thoth was as a secretary to Ra in the underworld

unify the two opposing traditions of the Egyptian people and their Greek rulers, called interpretatio graeca. Greek gods and myths were equated with those of other religions as an easy way to understand the invading culture. This was easily accepted by the Egyptians, who were already used to combining their deities as one. The Egyptian Osiris and Apis grew into the new 'Serapis', a figure joining Greek appearance and Egyptian religious ideas. This god was used as a poster-boy figure for this Greek integration, as the king took a pre-existing belief and capitalized on it, morphing the god into an amalgam of the two, and spreading this worship throughout Egypt for his own ends. The ancient Egyptian god Thoth did not escape this fate, as he was too a victim of this attempt at

integration. Thoth became associated with the Greek god Hermes, as the two ruled over similar forces in the universe.

Hermes was the Greek god of travellers, doorways, boundaries and their transgression, as well as herds, sleep and gymnastics, yet he is most famously known for being an emissary and messenger of the gods. Thoth has also been called a messenger; while some downplay this role and focus on his aspect as a scribe, it is understandable why some would equate the concepts of messenger and acting as an intermediary, particularly with both figures grounded in diplomacy and equilibrium. Hermes is usually depicted with a cap, winged boots, a kerykeion, caduceus or herald's staff as a symbol of peace, often wearing a robe or cape, only later developing into the naked youth we know today.

Strangely, Hermes was also known for magic, as

his helmet was said to conceal him, and it was he who gave a magical plant to the Odysseus to protect him from Circe. In the Hellenistic period, after the death of Alexander the Great in 323 BCE, Hermes grew in popularity, and his feats became embellished and even more celebrated. Some have suggested that, as emissary and messenger, the god was viewed as able to mediate between worlds, the seen and unseen, and because of this his sphere of influence might have extended to divination and magic-like the Egyptian god Thoth.

Soon, the two gods had been completely conflated through the interpretation graeca, and seen as one god. By the mid 1st century CE, Thoth was often referred to as 'Thrice Great', stemming from the Egyptian idea of composite deities with many aspects. While the exact meaning of 'Thrice Great' is still unknown, we can understand Thoth's importance as the

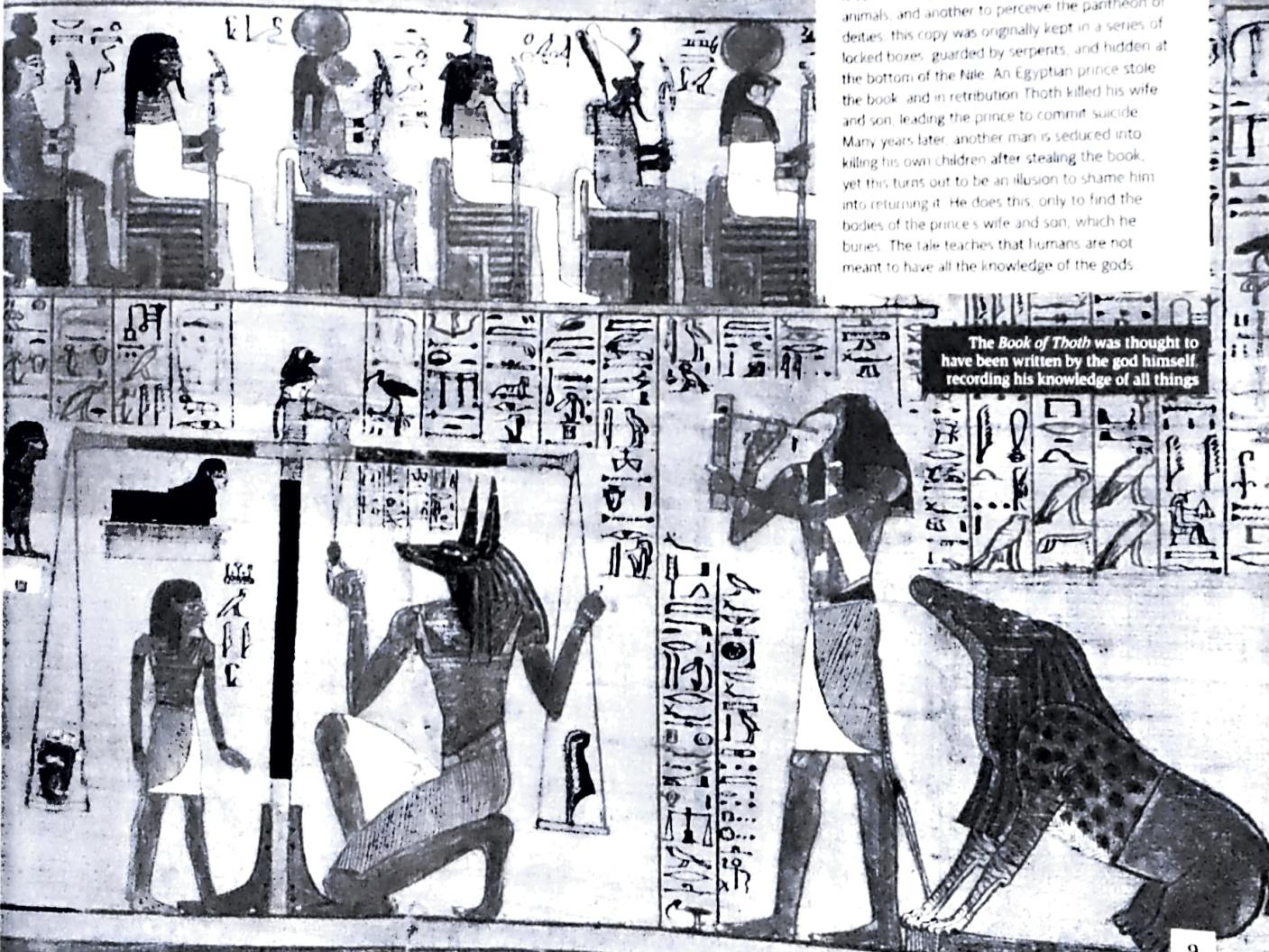
In the Egyptian creation myth, Thoth adds five days to the year, allowing Geb and Nut to procreate, and birth more gods

The mysterious Book of Thoth

The Book of Thoth was said to have been written by the god himself. The book is thought to have actually been a collection of texts, 42 books, in six categories, that were said to contain all of the philosophical knowledge of the Egyptian people. The work is referred to by Clement of Alexandria at the end of the second century CE, who attributes the works to Hermes. The books were thought to have been translated into Greek, and updated with Greek ideals. It's said that books covered the laws, deities and priestly instruction; instructions for how to serve the gods, knowledge of the geography of the world and writing, astrology and astronomy; religious compositions; and, finally, knowledge of medicine. While some have tried to include the Book of the Dead as part of the Book of Thoth, this was never accepted by the majority since he is only credited with writing part of it.

An account of a fictional Book of Thoth appears in the Ptolemaic period, and states that it contains a spell to understand the language of animals, and another to perceive the pantheon of deities. This copy was originally kept in a series of locked boxes, guarded by serpents, and hidden at the bottom of the Nile. An Egyptian prince stole the book, and in retribution Thoth killed his wife and son, leading the prince to commit suicide. Many years later, another man is seduced into killing his own children after stealing the book, yet this turns out to be an illusion to shame him into returning it. He does this, only to find the bodies of the prince's wife and son, which he buries. The tale teaches that humans are not meant to have all the knowledge of the gods.

The Book of Thoth was thought to have been written by the god himself, recording his knowledge of all things



Meet the gods of Egypt

Almost 1,500 deities are known by name and many of them combine with each other and share characteristics. Here are some of the most important

To the Egyptians, writing was sacred as it gave reliability, and enabled all knowledge of the world to be recorded



Ra

God of the Sun

Ra was Egypt's most important Sun god, also known as Khepri when rising. Atum when setting and the Aten as the solar disc. As the main creator deity, Ra also produced twin gods Shu and Tefnut.



Geb

God of the Earth

As the grandson of Ra and the son of Shu and Tefnut, green-skinned Geb represented the Earth and was usually shown reclining, stretched out beneath his sister-wife Nut.



Nut

Goddess of the sky

As granddaughter of Ra, Nut was the sky goddess whose star-spangled body formed the heavens, held above her brother Geb by their father Shu, god of air.



Isis

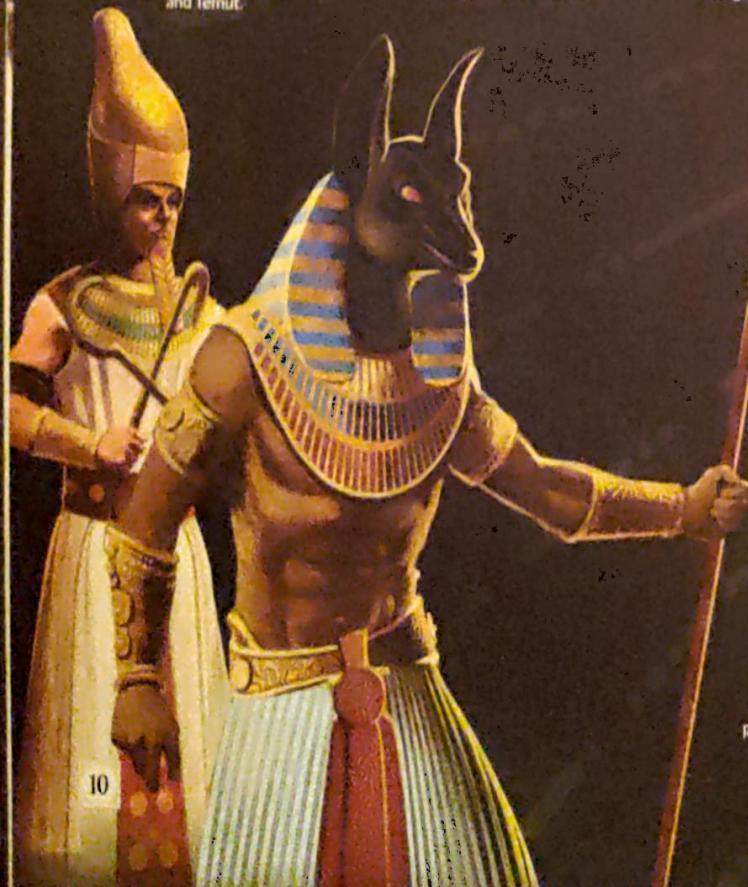
Goddess of motherhood and magic

The daughter of Geb and Nut, Isis was the perfect mother who eventually became Egypt's most important deity, 'more clever than a million gods' and 'more powerful than 1,000 soldiers'.

Osiris

God of resurrection and fertility

Isis's brother-husband Osiris was killed by his brother Seth, only to be resurrected by Isis to become Lord of the Underworld and the god of new life and fertility.



Horus

God of kingship

When his father Osiris became Lord of the Underworld, Horus succeeded him as king on Earth, and became the god with whom every human pharaoh was then identified.



Seth

God of storms and chaos

Represented as a composite mythical creature, Seth was a turbulent god who killed his brother Osiris, only to be defeated by Osiris's son and avenger Horus, helped by Isis.



Nephthys

Goddess of protection

As fourth child of Geb and Nut, Nepthys was partnered with her brother Seth, but most often accompanied her sister Isis as twin protectors of the king and of the dead.

The animal cults of ancient Egypt

The Egyptians greatly respected the natural world, particularly animals whose spirits were worshipped as divine. With Egypt's earliest known art representing animals alongside humans, various creatures were placed in human burials as early as c. 4000 BCE, and the relationship was a fundamental part of Egypt's evolving religion.

Gods could be portrayed entirely as an animal, or in human (anthropomorphic) form

with an animal's head, as imitated by masked priests. Many deities also had a sacred creature, which was worshipped in life then mummified at death.

The most important of these was the Aps Bull of Memphis. Believed to house the soul of the creator god Ptah when alive, it was then worshipped as the underworld god Osiris after its death when the next bull was selected to continue the cycle. Other sacred

bulls and cows were worshipped elsewhere in Egypt, with other animal cults including the sacred crocodiles of Sobek, representing the power of the king, and the sacred rams of the creator god Khnum. There were also the ibis and baboons representing the god Thoth, and the cats sacred to the feline deity Bastet. Such creatures were mummified in their millions as physical manifestations of the divine and symbols of Egypt's devotion to its creatures.



Ptah

God of creation and craftsmen

Ptah was a creator god and patron of craftsmen whose temple at Memphis, known as the 'House of Ptah's Soul' – 'hut-ka-ptah' – is the origin of the word 'Egypt'.

Thoth

God of learning and the moon

As the ibis-headed god of wisdom and patron of scribes, Thoth invented writing and brought knowledge to humans. His curved beak represented the crescent moon, and his main cult centre was Hermopolis.

Neith

Goddess of creation

As a primeval creator deity represented by her symbol of crossed arrows and shield, warlike Neith, 'Mistress of the Bow', was worshipped at her cult centre Sais in the Delta.

Amun

God of Thebes

Initially the local god of Thebes, whose name means 'the hidden one', Amun was combined with the Sun god Ra to become Amun-Ra, king of the gods and Egypt's state deity.

Hathor

Goddess of love, beauty and motherhood

Often represented as a cow or a woman with cow ears, Hathor symbolized pleasure and joy and as a nurturing deity protected both the living and the dead.

Sekhmet

Goddess of destruction

The lioness goddess Sekhmet controlled the forces of destruction and was the protector of the king in battle. Her smaller, more kindly form was Bastet the cat goddess, protector of the home.

"Gods could be portrayed in animal or human form, or as a human with an animal's head"



Anubis

God of embalming and the dead

The black jackal god Anubis was the guardian of cemeteries and god of embalming, who helped judge the dead before leading their souls into the afterlife.



Taweret

Goddess of the home and childbirth

Taweret was a knife-wielding hippopotamus goddess who guarded the home, a protector of women and children who was invoked during childbirth to scare away evil forces.



Bes

God of the home

and childbirth

Bes was a dwarf-like god of the household who protected women and children alongside Taweret, like her carrying knives for protection, in his case he carried musical instruments for pleasure.



Maat

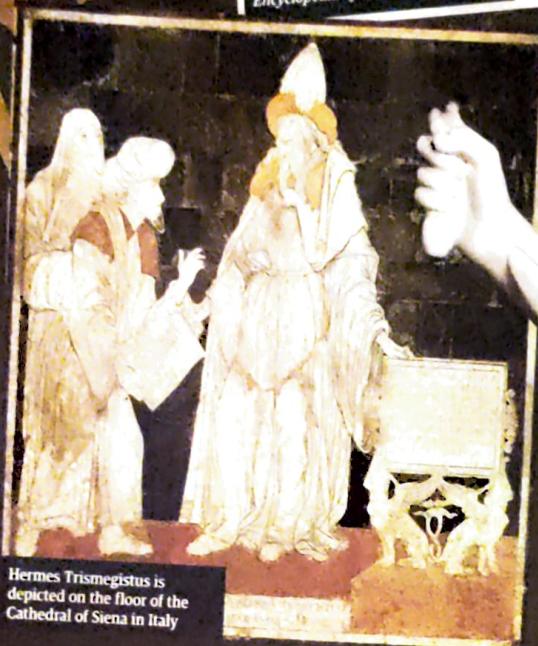
Goddess of truth and justice

As the deity who kept the universe in balance, Maat's symbol was an ostrich feather against which the hearts of the dead were weighed and judged in order to achieve eternal life.





Greek god
Hermes, the
son of Zeus



Hermes Trismegistus is
depicted on the floor of the
Cathedral of Siena in Italy

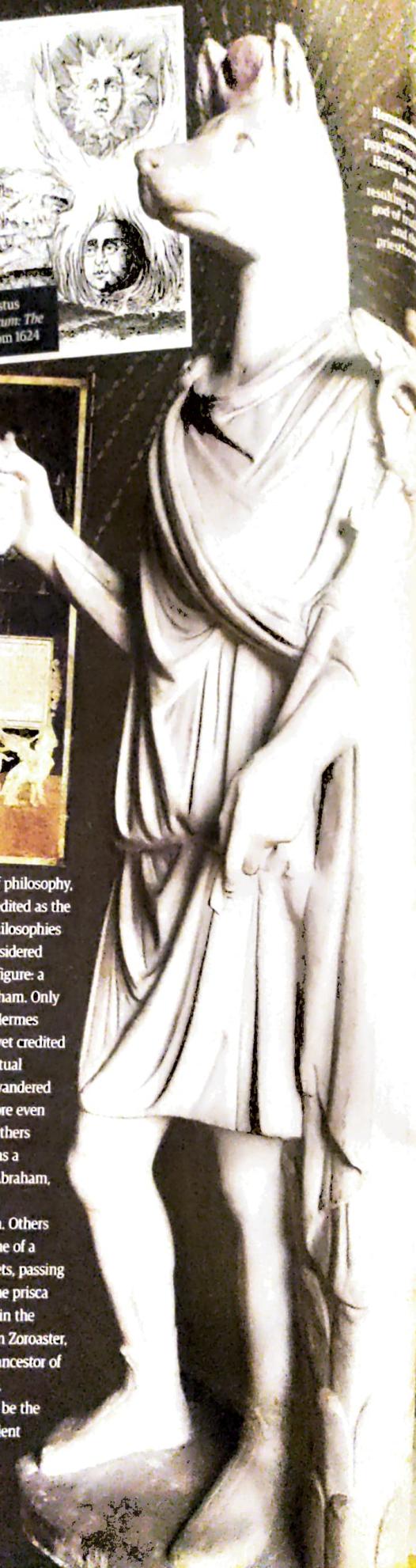


Picture of Hermes Trismegistus
from the *Viridarium Chymicum: The
Encyclopedia of Alchemy*, from 1624

personification of the mind of god, and the god who organizes and directs all governing forces of the known universe; the veneration of this god was some of the greatest in the land, and might go some way to explaining such a grand epithet. Most attribute the first instances of this name as appearing in the writings of Athenagoras of Athens and in a fragment from Philo of Byblos, while others take this back to Egyptian cult texts from the 2nd century BCE. Through this three-fold aspect of Thoth, and his association with Hermes, the composite—and more complex—figure of Hermes Trismegistus was born. The 10th century Suda, a Byzantine encyclopaedia, explains that Hermes was given the name of Trismegistus because there is one divine nature within the trinity; we can view this in a similar way to how Christianity has the divine trilogy of God, Jesus and the Holy Ghost, who are all separate yet integral.

Alchemy was the study of how to turn one substance, like base metals, into another—for instance, gold

Hermes Trismegistus was patron of philosophy, alchemy, magic and astrology, and credited as the instigator of one of the most mystical philosophies known to date. Historically, many considered Hermes Trismegistus to be an actual figure: a wise prophet, a contemporary of Abraham. Only one thing is for certain, the figure of Hermes Trismegistus is shrouded in mystery, yet credited with passing down sacred and ritual knowledge. Some say he wandered the lands of Egypt before even the time of Moses. Others believed that he was a contemporary of Abraham, passing on sacred knowledge to him. Others considered him one of a long line of prophets, passing on the one truth—the *prisca theologia*—from God, in the same vein as the Persian Zoroaster, and some believe he is an ancestor of the Prophet Muhammad himself. Hermes Trismegistus was believed to be the author of countless texts conveying ancient



western. Many say he is the author of the 42 books previously credited to Thoth, while Plato mentioned a hall containing 30,000 scrolls of ancient wisdom at the Temple of Neith at Sais in the Nile Delta. Some of these texts are collectively referred to as the *Hermetica*, which detailed knowledge of magic, the universe and the mind, in the form of a dialog

between a master and student, indeed the master was Hermes Trismegistus himself. This body of work became the basis of Hermeticism, dealing with magical plants and potions, making talismans, summoning spirits, with astrology and the drawing down of the stars. One of the most important of the *Hermetica* texts was the *Asclepius*, which explained how to trap demons and spirits inside statues, while his *Pythagoras* from the *Corpus Hermeticum* detailed the creation of the world by the son of God, known as the Word, reminiscent of the biblical Genesis. These texts are generally thought to originate between 100 to 300 CE, and can be divided into two types: those dealing with philosophy and those dealing with magic. Hermeticism focused on using magical religious practices to transcend the constraints of the physical body. These teachings became popular through the Hellenistic period, linked to Platonism and Neoplatonism, with an element of Jewish and Persian influences, and saw a revival with the alchemy of the Middle Ages right through to the Renaissance.

Various legends about the comings and goings of Hermes Trismegistus have been developed over the centuries. Some say that Hermes Trismegistus appeared in Islamic literature, in the form of the prophet Idris, with his writing being recorded by Ikhwan al-Safa, a secret society of Muslim philosophers translated as 'The Brethren of Purity'. Others go so far as to claim that he travelled from Egypt to visit advanced races living in outer space and even to Heaven itself, before returning to Earth. He is also credited with building the pyramids at Giza. The Emerald Tablet sheds light on these beliefs, as it is seen as one of the foundations of Hermetic practice written by Hermes Trismegistus himself. The tablet is associated with the secret of the prima materia and the Philosopher's Stone.

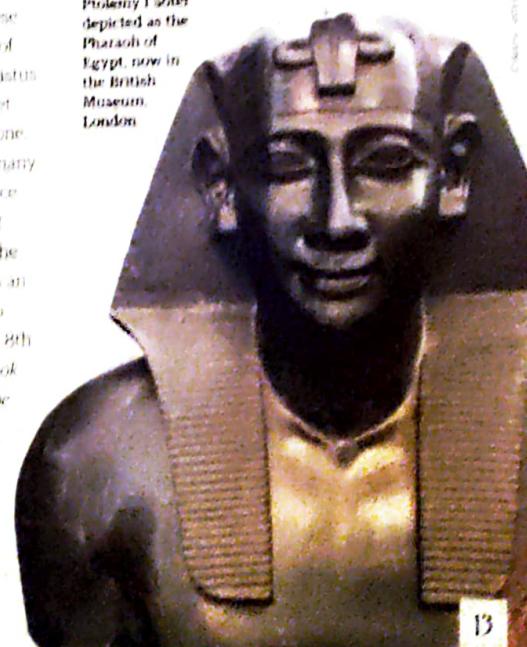
Although the origin of the tablet is murky, many believe it is another example of a source credited with being older than it actually is, and in reality the first reference to it is an Arabic text dating to between the 6th and 8th centuries BCE. *The Book of Balinus the Wise on the Causes*. Legend tells that the tablet was found in the arms of a corpse, seated on a golden throne under a statue of Hermes in Tyana. The tablet

was not translated into Latin until the 12th century, and a translation was found amongst French papers, and it was believed to be extremely later (possibly 16th century).

While the belief that the texts, and indeed the figure of Hermes Trismegistus, were genuine, an analysis by Isaac Casaubon in the 17th and 18th centuries pointed out that these were indeed much later than believed and could not have been written by the mystical prophet. This opinion has since been challenged by many.

In conclusion, it seems that the texts attributed to the ancient prophet were likely phony Greek texts written by multiple authors from the 1st and 2nd century CE, and after incorporating beliefs and texts from much earlier Egyptian traditions linked to the god Thoth, and indeed updated to incorporate 'new' ideas initially for the political elite of social integration and the acceptance of a new branch of rulers in Egypt. The figure of Hermes Trismegistus did indeed act as a much-needed historical base for the tradition, and drew together the disparate ideas, neatly packaging them as a coherent belief system with a central figure. While the validity of Hermes Trismegistus and his writings are highly questionable and an absolute falsehood for most scholars, there is certainly no doubt that his influence has reached far and wide across continents and across history to capture the imaginations of many, and create a mystical tradition that countless people still adhere to today.

Ptolemy I Soter depicted as the Pharaoh of Egypt, now in the British Museum, London



Crowley's Thoth tarot deck

The Thoth tarot was a deck published by Ordo Templi Orientis in 1969, after both of the creators had passed away. Painted by Lady Frieda Harris, based on the mystical instructions from Aleister Crowley, and paired with his book on the deck, *The Book of Thoth*, written between 1938 and 1943. The depictions on each of the cards are inspired by various mystical systems, as well as philosophy and science, in an attempt to reinvigorate and reinterpret the traditional meanings, as is encouraged for all initiates to the Order of the Golden Dawn as part of their spiritual journey. Crowley changed many of the Major Arcana names, as well as renaming pages to princesses, and knights to princes in the Court Cards. Another major difference in the deck is that he modified the corresponding Hebrew letters and astrological associations of the cards, based on his own reading of their symbolism in line with his teaching in his *Book of the Law*. He also gave a title to each of the Minor Arcana cards. While the accompanying book is meant to act somewhat as an instruction manual, Crowley's deck is infamous for its mystic nature and inaccessibility for the uninitiated. A modified version of the deck, including two original cards by Lady Frieda Harris but rejected by Crowley, is still available from U.S. Games Systems.

The Thoth tarot deck is still incredibly popular with people today, seen to hold great divinatory wisdom



Haruspicy

People see signs in everything, including animal entrails. The ancient Romans searched through the bodies of sacrificed animals to see what the future held...

Written by Poppy-Jay Palmer

The ancient Etruscans developed an advanced civilisation in Italy before the Roman Empire, possessing sophisticated forms of art and culture, and it was no different when it came to divination. One practice that became popular with the ancient Etruscans was haruspicy. In fact, it was so popular that, as with art and culture, it eventually made its way to ancient Rome.

With the practice tracing all the way back to at least the third millennium BCE, a haruspex, someone trained in haruspicy, could predict the future by reading omens found in the entrails of animals like sheep and poultry. To interpret the divine, they would ritually slaughter livestock as a sacrifice, butcher it, examine the size,

shape, color and markings of the animal's internal organs, primarily the liver but also the gall bladder, heart and lungs, and then roast the meat to share in a sacred meal with celebrants. The sacrifice usually took place during ceremonies where the Sun god could influence the entrails' appearances.

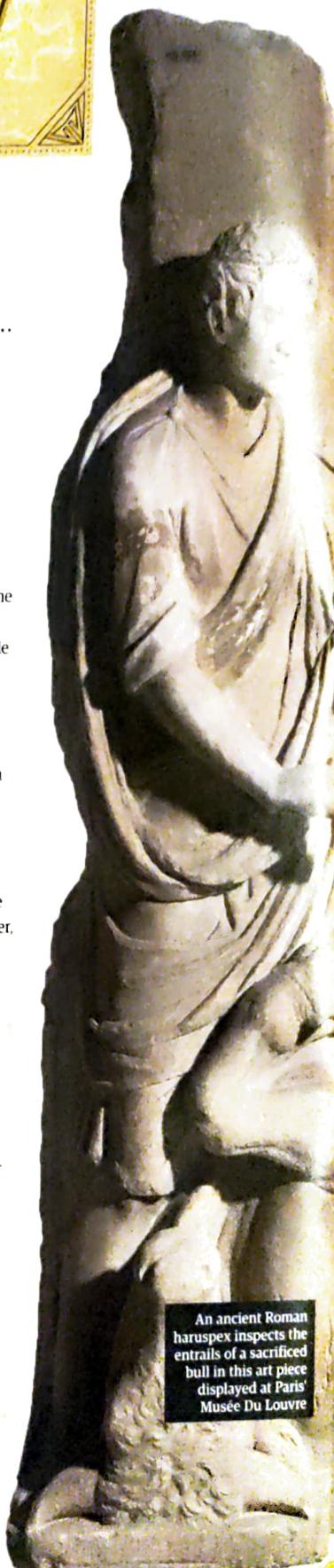
Haruspices would charge people to ask a question, to which they would be able to answer 'yes' or 'no' by studying the entrails, weighing up the positive and negative omens and seeing which one prevailed. As divination was a trusted and elaborate practice, haruspices had to undergo extremely specialized training in order to be taken seriously. A manual called the *Bārūtu*, or 'Art of the Diviner', was circulated from around 600 BCE or earlier, and took up 135 clay tablets.

It's believed that Archbishop of Canterbury Thomas à Becket consulted a haruspex before an expedition against Brittany

"A haruspex, someone trained in haruspicy, could predict the future by reading omens found in the entrails of animals like sheep"



An ancient Roman haruspex inspects the entrails of a sacrificed bull in this art piece displayed at Paris' Musée Du Louvre



After the practice, which was directly derived from the Etruscan religion, was adopted by the Romans. It also became popular with both Christian apostles and pagans, and continued to be regularly used well into the Middle Ages. The Babylonians were also famous for haruspicy, which is mentioned in the Book of Ezekiel 21:21.

'For the king of the Babylon standeth at the parting of the way, at the head of the two ways, to use divination: he shaketh the arrows to and fro, he inquiring of the seraphim: he looketh at the liver.'

In modern society, slaughtering your own livestock is often frowned upon, so diviners

have been known to substitute the sacrificial animal for eggs, instead cracking them open and examining the insides. It is believed that ancient haruspices used to read the entrails of animals because it was a lot more ceremonious and solemn than cracking an egg and presenting the findings.



Renaissance magic

The passion for knowledge and how to use it led thinkers deep into a mysterious world where the boundaries between nature, supernature and religion were far from clear

Written by Derek Wilson

In the 15th and 16th centuries the western and near-eastern worlds were home to three major religions—Christianity, Islam and Judaism. All had their intellectual elites with their own convictions about the cosmos and man's place in it. There also existed a multi-faceted paganism, which saw the world as populated with an array of spirit beings, beneficent and malign, who constantly intervened in the lives of humans. All thinking participants in this rainbow-hued speculation had one thing in common: they all agreed that life had meaning. The scholars of these great religions might have continued to work within their own traditions were it not for a series of events in the century 1440-1540 that brought about the most far-reaching intellectual revolution in our history—a revolution that later ages came to call the 'Renaissance'.

There were three powerful factors that brought about this transformation. The first (c.1440) was the invention of a printing press that used moveable type. Before this, books had been expensive, hand-written products that could only be read in libraries or in the homes of wealthy collectors. Now that printing was a fast-growing industry, scholars and students could buy their own copies of mass-produced works and exchange their own ideas with each other.

The second event added significantly to the number of books available. In 1453 the great city of Constantinople, capital of the Eastern Christian Empire, was captured by Muslim Turks after a 53-day siege. Among the citizens who fled from this invasion were leading intellectuals who took with them several of their precious ancient texts. The boundaries of academic debate now widened to embrace both newly available religious/philosophical thinking and the re-interpretation of traditional beliefs.

The third event was an even more radical understanding of Christian truth. Around 1520, thinkers and preachers in various parts of Europe began to challenge various aspects of orthodox Church teaching.

This came to be known as the Reformation. The combination of these influences—and not forgetting the pagan superstition,

which was felt by people at all levels of society—produced a large array of ideas and beliefs that led to vigorous debate, widespread persecution and, eventually, to war.

The first 'factory' creating this new thinking was North Italy. Scholars working in universities such as Florence and Bologna or in the households of wealthy patrons—merchant princes, rulers of city states or senior ecclesiastics—were much involved in studying



the works of classical antiquity—the great philosophers, poets and historians of Greece and Rome who were the founders of their own culture. When the refugees from Constantinople arrived they brought, as well as their own religious, poetic and historical writings, writings of classical authors, which had been long lost in the West but preserved in the East, some of them translated into Arabic.

Scholarly Jews also found themselves forced to flee their homes in these years, some from the conquering Muslims in the East and some from Spain, where a purge spearheaded by King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella led to the expulsion or forced conversion of Jews in 1492. As a result, students of the Hebrew Wisdom literature, and especially of that esoteric branch known as Kabbalah, were drawn to the Italian centers of intellectual activity and found themselves debating with their Christian and Muslim counterparts.

To advanced Renaissance thinkers it now seemed obvious that the three great religions must all owe their origins to a more fundamental source of truth and wisdom. This 'prisca theologia' was ardently sought by Renaissance scholars. It was—or so they

thought—the gateway to what the ancient Greeks called 'gnosis' (knowledge)—and also to what they labelled 'exousia' (authority/power). The two were inseparably linked, for the person who understood the nature and workings of the temporal and spiritual realms could use that knowledge in a variety of ways. Such men were magi or magicians.

Everyone in medieval society believed in magic, the ability to manipulate the forces latent in nature. The ranks of those initiated into the occult (supernatural or mystical knowledge) included the local wise woman, the herbalist, the apothecary, the alchemist, the astrologer and the necromancer. Church leaders were ardent in warning against malign magic but none doubted the reality of harnessing the forces of nature and supernature. Many clergy, for example, cast horoscopes. There was no clear distinction between theological and philosophical understanding of the workings of the universe. If God had endowed certain herbs with medicinal properties to relieve human suffering, could he not also have arranged the motions of heavenly bodies to assist in the wellbeing of mankind? The distinction between village folklore and philosophical speculation might appear to be

absolute but in reality any difference boils down to degrees of intellectual sophistication.

Let us, for the moment, restrict our debate to the profound Renaissance thinkers who were striving to frame an orderly understanding of the workings of the universe. The lead in these deliberations was taken by a group in Florence founded by Marsilio Ficino. It was known as the Platonic Academy because it took its inspiration from the followers of the 6th-century BCE Athenian philosopher Plato.

The Academicians were, however, Neoplatonists because they belonged to a long tradition of philosophers who sought to relate the teaching of the Greek master to later intellectual/spiritual developments, particularly the advent of Christianity. For Ficino and his friends an unbroken chain of gnosis stretched right back, via Plato, to the *prisca theologia*.

Neoplatonism rejected a clear-cut distinction between matter and spirit. Everything in the universe was suffused by spiritual entities, all of which interacted to control terrestrial life, the movements of the spheres and the activities of the Creator and his angelic cohorts in heaven. The branch of philosophy to which Neoplatonism belongs is called 'metaphysics', the



An alchemist works at his craft in this 17th-century painting by Adriaen van Ostade

study of what lies above and beyond the physical universe that we apprehend with our five senses. He called this the working of the *esoteric way* to be set apart from the *exoteric way*, in other words, to perform magic. Mephistopheles identified three categories of magic. Natural magic harnessed the forces present in earth. This embraced herbology using the properties of plants to cure medicines, but also included capable of affecting personality. But it also extended to working the human body and the use of fire, air and water by changing the composition of material substances. From the latter the science of chemistry would grow but it also embraced the concept of transmuting basic elements, such as changing lead into gold. The second category was celestial magic, which concerned studying the movements of heavenly bodies and their influence on human behaviour and destiny. The third branch was ceremonial magic, which involved conjuring spiritual beings to do one's bidding. A necromancer might consort with the dead to discover buried treasure or perform spells to harm his enemies.

It can be seen how all of these have their appeal to human beings, trapped in a universe they do not understand, and captive also, to their own inner compulsions: ambition, greed, lust or even, simply the desire to be happy and healthy. Preachers and moralists were not slow to point out the dangers of dabbling in matters beyond what

God allowed. Early in the Renaissance period a popular legend began circulating about a certain young man whose intellectual pride and insatiable curiosity drove him into the arms of the devil. At the end of the 16th century Christopher Marlowe turned this story into a play, *Doctor Faustus*. He presented his central character as one who had mastered all branches of human knowledge and found them wanting until he eventually discovered magic.

*These Mephistophelian
of magistracy
And Nauymantic books
are having
These cycles, scenes, letters
and characters
At these are these that*

*Finis his most desire
at what a world of profit and delight
of power, of honour, of omnipotence
is promised to the studious artificer
All things that move between the quiet pole
Shall be at my command!*

Faustus makes a pact with Mephistopheles, a spirit sent by 'Satan' to do a deal, ultimately to live in exchange for Faustus's soul. The philosopher goes a whole of a time, until the day comes when the debt has to be paid.

This, however, is far from the rarified atmosphere of the Renaissance scholars studying ancient authors to discover wisdom for its own sake. Ficino took what was considered to be a major step forward when he translated into Latin a body of writings brought from Constantinople

The British Museum holds several artifacts once owned by John Dee, including an amulet and crystal globe



Marsilio Ficino (first on left)
from a fresco painted by
Domenico Ghirlandaio

England's most famous magus

The extraordinary life of John Dee (1527-1608/9) provides us with a vivid example of how science, philosophy and magic interacted in many Renaissance thinkers. He was one of the most brilliant students to emerge from Cambridge University. Though his studies embraced many subjects, his main interest was mathematics. For him the 'magic' of numbers provided an insight into the mind of God. He applied his skills to cartography and the provision of navigational aids for mariners. From here it was but a short step to promoting England's overseas expansion during the reign of Elizabeth I. But he also studied hermetic philosophy, astrology and alchemy. He enjoyed the patronage of the queen, for whom he cast horoscopes. Increasingly his mind turned towards the conjuration of spirits in which he was assisted by the charlatan, Edward Kelly, who cashed in on Dee's fame for his own ends. Together the two men travelled to several European courts in the 1580s seeking new patrons with their promises of providing the guidance of the spirits and the secret of turning base metals into gold. By the time Dee returned to England, having broken his relationship with Kelly, he discovered that public opinion had turned against his dabbling with 'Satanic' magic and that his laboratory had been trashed by angry neighbours. He never regained his earlier fame and eventually died in comparative poverty.

Many of Dee's prized books and instruments were stolen while he travelled Europe



Hermes Trismagistus pictured with the personifications of Orient and the Occident, from the marble floor of the Siena Cathedral



than 300 CE. This was demonstrated in 1614 by Genevan scholar, Isaac Casaubon, regarded by many contemporaries as the most brilliant Greek scholar of the age.

Away from the rarified atmosphere of philosophical debate, ordinary mortals needed help in coping with the problems of everyday existence. For most people life was, by modern European standards, short and uncomfortable. Average life expectancy was about 35. Most people dwelt in what we would think of as slum conditions. Disease was rife. For example, Renaissance Europe had not yet fully recovered from the Black Death, which had run amok in the mid-14th century and wiped out between a third and a half of the population. Poverty was rife and many families lived a precarious existence on the subsistence level. They needed all the help they could get for their own wellbeing and that of their animals and their crops. No less than the magi, untutored folk believed that the material world was suffused with the spiritual and when they were in need they turned to the 'experts' in their midst who could invoke the aid of higher powers. There were two sources of supernatural power. One was accessed via the Church. The other was available from the practitioners of folk religion.

The most regular 'magic' practiced by parish priests was the mass, a service during which the officiant took bread and wine, consecrated them and, by so doing, 'transubstantiated' them into the actual body and blood of Christ. This 'priestly miracle' was the focus of religious life, and masses were performed constantly. For many people the mass elements themselves came to be regarded as possessing holy power. Some worshippers were known to take the consecrated bread away from church, instead of eating it, to use as a charm. The Church disapproved of this but, at the same time,

which he entitled the *Corpus Hermeticum*. This long-lost text purported to be a classical Greek collection of Greco-Egyptian wisdom dating back even further—perhaps 9,000 years—and taught by Hermes Trismagistus—'Thrice Great Hermes'. This figure was a god, worshipped by Egyptians as Thoth and by Greeks as Hermes. His teaching was supposedly relayed in various strands. He featured in Zoroastrian worship. He appeared in the Quran as a prophet. Jewish writings mentioned him as a contemporary of Moses. It is easy to see why his Renaissance rediscoverers should have associated him with the prisca theologia. The Hermetic writings were mystical and complex. They could

scarcely be otherwise, since they claimed to explain everything. Keith Thomas, in *Religion and the Decline of Magic* offered this summary:

"It taught that by mystical regeneration it was possible for man to regain dominion over nature which he had lost at the Fall [in the Garden of Eden]. Its astrological and alchemical lore helped to create an intellectual environment sympathetic to every kind of mystical and magical activity."

It was all incredibly mysterious and impressive and compelling. The only problem was that the *Corpus Hermeticum* was a fraud. That is to say that, while elements of it went back to classical times, the compendium was written no earlier

"The mass elements themselves came to be regarded as possessing holy power"

they encouraged this materialistic approach by sponsoring the veneration of holy 'relics'. Items supposedly associated with Christ or the saints were displayed in shrines so that pilgrims could look at, touch or kiss the cases of such relics as a finger of St Peter, or a fragment of wood from the true Cross. One of the first books published by the pioneer English printer, William Caxton, was a translation of *The Golden Legend* (1480), an earlier collection of stories describing miracles wrought by saints or their relics. It recorded how a whole city was miraculously preserved by the cloth spread over the tomb of the local martyr, St Agatha. A year after her death the mountain that looms over Catania erupted and spewed a river of fire and molten rock down towards the city. Then crowds of pagans fled from the mountain to the saint's tomb, snatched up the pall that covered it and hung it up in the path of the fire and the stream of lava halted and did not advance a foot farther.

Folk religion took on a confusing variety of forms. Popular magic practitioners were known as witches, wizards, cunning men, women, conjurers, sorcerers, etc. Some used herbal remedies, others employed potions, spells, incantations or astrological prediction. The only thing they all had in common was arcane knowledge that they kept secret. In the common mind there was little, if anything, to distinguish between Church magic and traditional folk remedies. If

your child was sick, or your crops spoiled, if you were lovesick or angry with your neighbour, if you wanted to know how a business venture would turn out or were desperately in need of a son to inherit your property there were a variety of specialists at your disposal. The help you received might contain both religious and naturalistic elements, such as visiting a specific shrine and there repeating mystic incantations. In the 1550s a Somerset cunning woman, Joan Tyrrell, prescribed herbs for treating a bewitched person but insisted that they should be gathered while reciting five Paternosters, five Ave Marias and a Creed.

But things were changing drastically as Renaissance and, then, Reformation thinking spread throughout Europe. The Church, led by

Pope Innocent VIII, sought to disentangle itself from popular magic. The Catholic faith was coming under pressure from various directions and fought back vigorously to wrest control of men's minds from heresy and all unorthodox beliefs. The message now went out that any supernatural power which did not have ecclesiastical backing came, not from God, but from Satan.

In 1486 two Dominican friars published a comperiduous description and denunciation of witchcraft called the *Malleus Maleficarum*. This

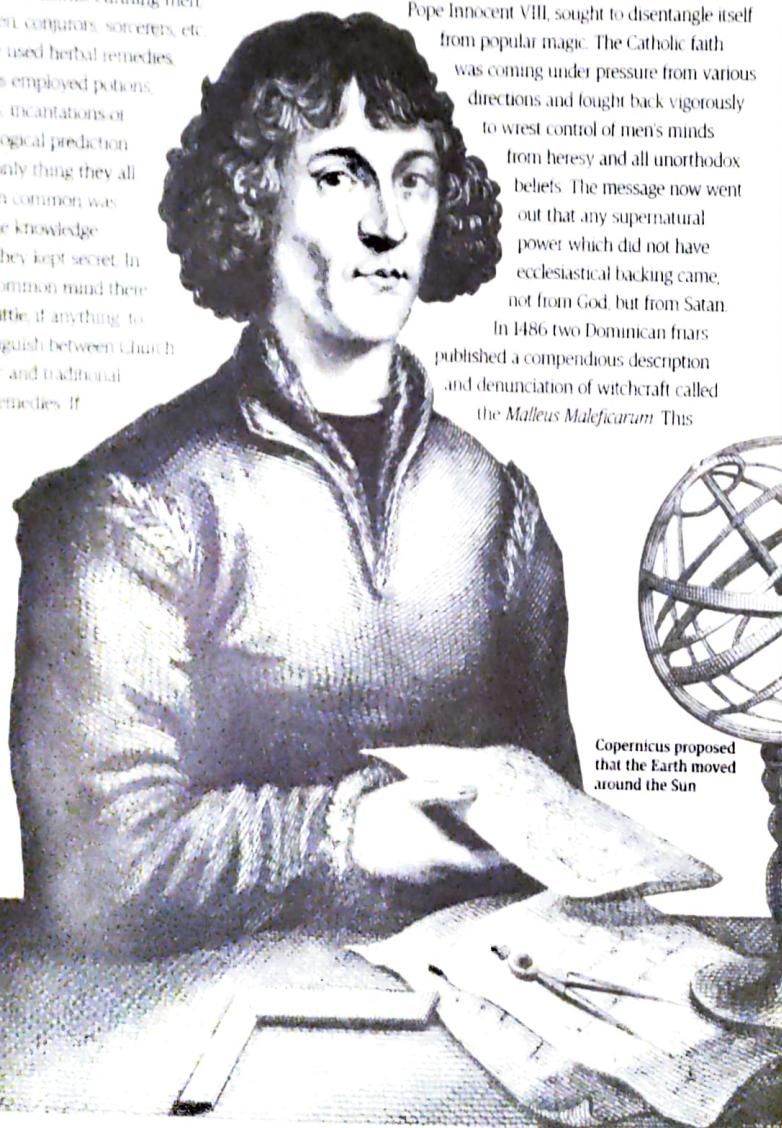
Legend has it
that Copernicus was
presented with the
final printed pages of
his book on the very
day that he died

notorious book asserted that all practitioners of folk religion had sold their souls and laid down rules for interrogation, conviction and punishment of suspects. In fact, it did not become the weapon

in the persecutors' armoury for another century. Its importance lies in what it reveals about the intellectual climate of the time.

A rising tide of scepticism in Europe was threatening to sweep into the foundations of the medieval Church and weaken it. People questioned the power of the priesthood and the moral standards of its representatives.

Renaissance thinkers like Ficino did not cease to be devout Catholics but their speculations about the history of Christianity and its connection with Islamic and Jewish thought challenged official teaching. At the grassroots the spread of literacy and the reading



of vernacular Bibles by enraged ordinary people to think for themselves. The emphasis moved away from the performance of rituals and the veneration of holy things to reflection on ideas and the embracing of personal theological beliefs. The Renaissance also presented challenging theories in the realm of science. Nicholas Copernicus, for example, produced evidence for the belief that the Earth moved round the sun, and not vice versa. Then in 1517 the German monk Martin Luther went for the papal jugular by declaring that the pope did not have power to forgive sins. This outrageous claim,

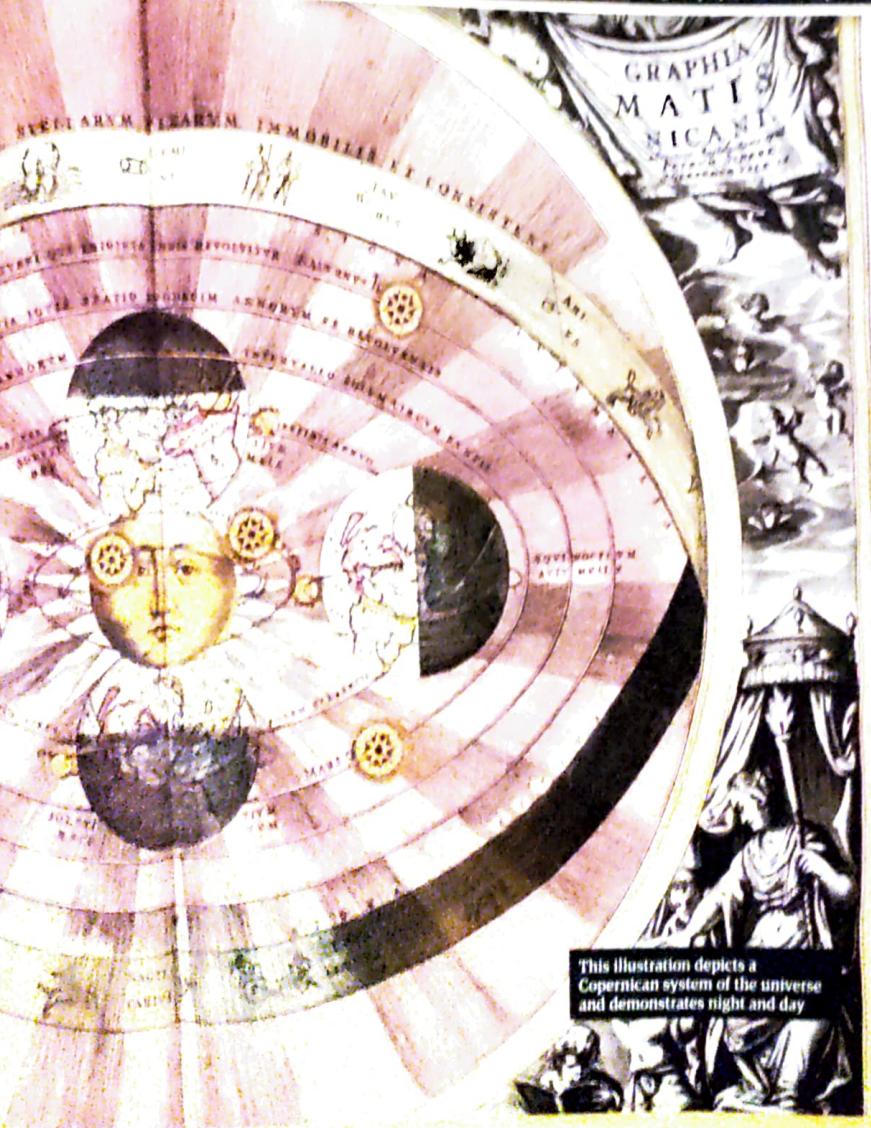
backed up by proofs from the Bible, struck such a chord with so many people that it triggered the Reformation. Some zealots attacked shrines and images that represented the old religion.

Instead of cautiously welcoming the new thinking and engaging in debate with the

representatives of ecclesiastical power, these heretics dug their heels in, determined to protect Catholic tradition at all costs. These heretical leaders had challenged official teaching. They reviled one another as heretics, demanded that they renounce their errors and they persecuted others of their religion. Ironically, some of the heretics' heresies were later to be adopted by the church. But the religious leaders agreed with Papal confirmation of these heresies, which

the most ardent persecutors of heretics in the 1500s

A scene from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, one of the more magical plays from Shakespeare



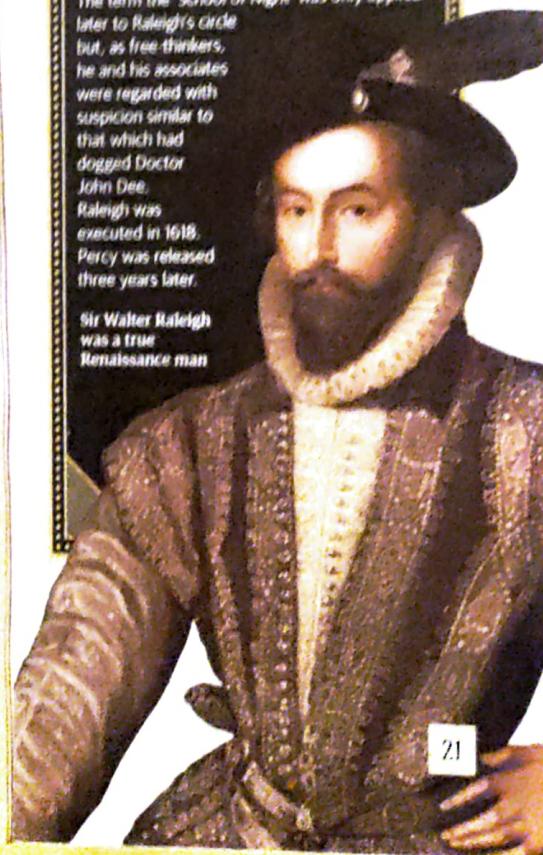
This illustration depicts a Copernican system of the universe and demonstrates night and day

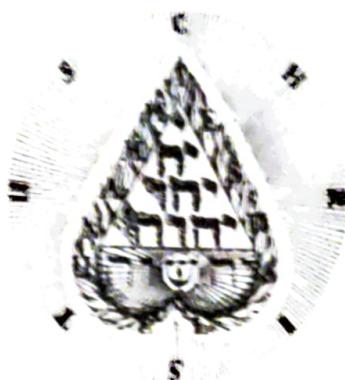
The School of Night

One of the strangest 'academies' where amateur scholars dabbled in arcane knowledge and were widely suspected of magical practices was held in a prison—and not any prison. This intellectual salon met in the Tower of London. Soon after the accession of James I in 1603, Queen Elizabeth's favourite, Sir Walter Raleigh (1552-1618), was arrested on suspicion of being involved in a plot against the new king. Though found guilty, his life was spared and he was lodged in the Tower. Two years later, Henry Percy, Earl of Northumberland (1564-1632) was accused of complicity in the Gunpowder Plot and suffered the same fate. The conditions of their imprisonment were far from harsh. They had spacious quarters, kept servants and received visitors. They also devoted themselves to the study of philosophy, theology and astrology, being joined by scholars such as Thomas Harriot (1560-1621), the inventor of navigational instruments and an astronomical telescope. Raleigh wrote *A History of the World*, Percy amassed a large library and equipped a laboratory for carrying out alchemical experiments. All this, plus the personal reputations of the two men and the enmity of King James (who was paranoid about witchcraft) was enough to engender Faustian suspicions of probing forbidden knowledge. They were accused of atheism (in those days only scarcely less reprehensible than treason) and Percy was widely known as the 'Wizard Earl'. The term the 'School of Night' was only applied later to Raleigh's circle but, as free thinkers, he and his associates were regarded with suspicion similar to that which had dogged Doctor John Dee.

Raleigh was executed in 1618. Percy was released three years later.

Sir Walter Raleigh
was a true
Renaissance man





Kabbalah

Drawing upon Judaism, Kabbalah is a mystical tradition that centers on receiving knowledge of God and guidance for everyday living

Written by David Crookes

Think of the mystical religion Kabbalah, and many will immediately picture the singer Madonna. As one of a number of celebrities to embrace its ancient wisdom in recent years, she has sought to study and understand Kabbalah's deep teachings, often in the face of great criticism. Through her efforts people have learned of some aspects of the religion, not least the strand of red-string bracelet that many contemporary followers wear to ward off the evil eye.

But Kabbalah is no celebrity fad, nor is it by any means a newfangled religion. It's the theology of the Jewish people and the spiritual study of unseen laws governing the universe from the perspective of Judaism. Those who follow it have done so because they believe it gives them a great understanding into the workings and the structure of the human soul. Indeed, its origins are said to stretch back to the Holy Scriptures, to Adam, the first man.

According to Kabbalistic tradition, Adam was both the spiritual and biological ancestor of humans and he was also androgynous. He was split into two halves after eating from the tree of

knowledge of good and evil but then received his teachings for mankind through the Archangel Raziel, the Keeper of Secrets. Kabbalists believe man and woman must merge in marriage to form a full soul. More than that, tradition teaches the souls of all humans combine to form one soul, which is that of Adam.

Abraham also figures highly in Kabbalah, as he does in Judaism as a whole (he is seen as the founding father of the Covenant). Traditional Kabbalists believe Abraham, who lived around 1700 BCE, received the truth of Kabbalah and wrote the *Sefer Yetzirah*, the earliest extant book on Jewish esoterism and the first Kabbalistic text. For that reason, it has become a primary source for students of Kabbalah and it also reinforces Abraham's view that God is One.

Such beliefs were cemented by the prophet and teacher Moses who ascended Mount Sinai and received the Commandments from God along with the Oral Torah. The latter contained the laws, statutes and legal interpretations that had not been noted in the Written Torah (the Five Books of Moses) and the Kabbalistic truths they contained paved a spiritual level of existence that explored the nature of the soul. Bodies were seen

Even though Kabbalists say that humankind's greatest pleasure is to know God, their view is that knowledge of God is impossible

"Kabbalah is the spiritual study of unseen laws governing the universe"



This is a fragment of the Zohar, a collection of commentaries on the Torah which forms a primary book for Kabbalists

As temporary souls everlasting. Fundamentally, Kabbalah became a way for Judaism to understand God and receive his knowledge.

To that end, Jews sought to pass down their knowledge through the generations, even though they had suffered from oppression throughout the Roman Empire. From about 100 BC to 1000 CE, for instance, Merkabah mysticism had emerged as a school of early Jewish mysticism and the mystics focused on the Book of Ezekiel in the Hebrew Bible. The first chapter centered on prophet Ezekiel's vision of riding to the heavens in a divine chariot. Mystics sought to interpret the meaning of the vision and what it said and revealed about God.

The idea manifested itself in a study called ma'aseh merkabah which taught that the path to God was strewn with obstacles and encouraged Jews to train their minds in order to connect on an emotional as well as physical level. Meanwhile, ma'aseh bereshit emerged as a mystical understanding of verses in the book of Genesis.

The Kabbalah Centre seeks to openly teach traditional Jewish Kabbalah today. It was founded by Philip Berg in 1965

Kabbalists say that God is constantly creating the world through ten fundamental forces called the sefirot

It interpreted the first chapter as a metaphor of upper and lower worlds split between God and humans. Kabbalah grew from both studies as followers sought to question and probe more deeply, to look beyond the surface of whatever was presented to them.

Kabbalah, however, did not reach maturity until the 13th century, and it was from this point on that the idea truly spread, thanks to its switch from an oral tradition to one that was written. The most famous work of Kabbalah, the *Zohar*, emerged. Written in Aramaic, it was revealed by the Spanish Kabbalist Moses de Leon who claimed it was the work of Rabbi Shimon bar

Yochai, a Jewish writer who lived in the second century. As with the Talmud, the texts of which included the ma'aseh merkabah and ma'aseh bereshit, it ended up standing alongside both the Talmud and the Torah as important pillars of the wisdom writing of the Children of Israel in Kabbalah tradition.

But what was it? The *Zohar* was a series of books that commented on the mystical aspects of the Torah, exploring the nature of God and the human soul as well as good, evil and sin. It looked at the structure of the universe and its origins and it became vitally important for students. The *Zohar* was also greatly significant for the Jews badly affected by the Alhambra Decree of 1492, which saw them forced to convert to Christianity or be expelled from the Kingdoms of Castile and Aragon on the orders of the joint Catholic monarchs of Spain.

Such was Kabbalah's intensity, however, that those seeking to understand had to be aged over 40 (this is due to the first major written collection of the Oral Torah, the Mishnah, speaking of 40 as being the best age for understanding [Ethics of the Fathers 5:24]). It was also preferable for students to be married, which again was seen as a sign of maturity and experience. There was a debate, too, over who actually wrote the *Zohar* with academics since claiming it to be the work of Rabbi Moses de Leon. Regardless, Judaism became a more inner experience for many.

Much of that was down to Jewish mystic Rabbi Isaac Luria who transformed the study before his death in 1572. Key to his interpretation was tzimtzum, the understanding that only God existed before the creation and that he began the process

The Tree of Life with its ten sefirot, as presented in the *sefer yetzirah* which is the earliest extant book on Jewish esoterism



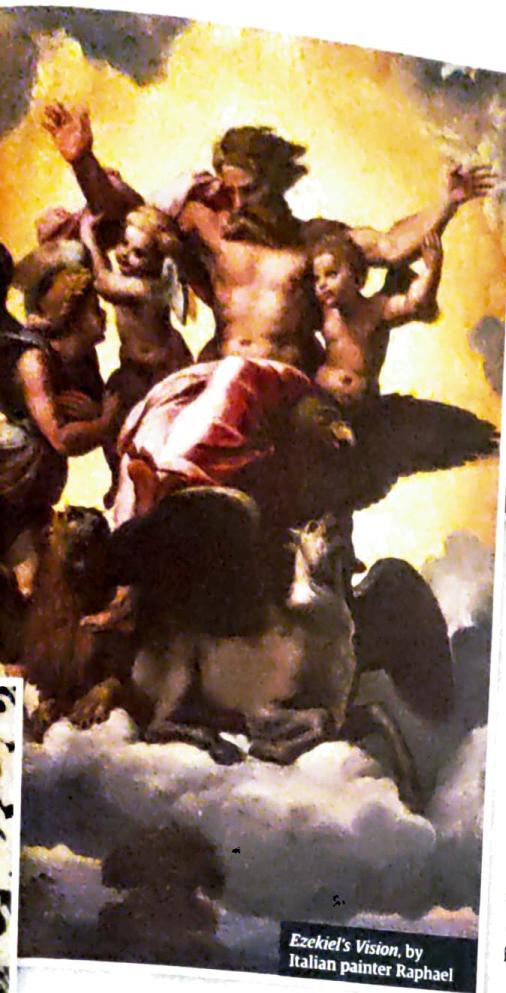
בְּכָל־מִלְשָׁנָה
בְּכָל־לְזִמְרָה
בְּכָל־מִכְלָה
בְּכָל־כָּלָה
בְּכָל־זָהָב

Jewish Kabbalists read the Torah on four levels, looking at its literal meaning, what it implies, the lessons that can be learned and the secrets it contains



German occult writer Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa





Ezekiel's Vision, by Italian painter Raphael

of creation by contracting his infinite light to make room for a finite, pluralistic world. This work was passed on thanks to Rabbi Chaim Vital who put the teachings down in writing.

From that emerged the ten sefirot that made up the Kabbalah Tree of Life (that is, the spiritual attributes in which The Infinite God is revealed including primary will, wisdom, understanding, judgement, lovingkindness, might, beauty, glory, victory, connection, sovereignty and the Divine Presence). Such teachings were later adapted by occultist and western esoteric movements, with the Renaissance seeing Christian Kabbalah emerge thanks to a growing appetite for interpreting Christianity from a mystical point of view.

Christian Kabbalah reinterpreted the doctrine of Jewish Kabbalah by linking the atonement and resurrection of Jesus Christ to the ten sefirot. In the Christian Kabbalah's Tree of Life, the three topmost spheres became connected to the Trinity, the rest concerning themselves with Earth. Hermetic Qabalah then arose from a desire to find proof of Christian

Kabbalists believe that our souls will greatly outlive our bodies and that we live in both the physical and spiritual worlds

Even so, Luria's initial influence continues to this day (and that's quite aside from Madonna writing a song called *Isaac* in 2005 which many believed was about him). The Kabbalah Centre, led by Rabbi Philip Berg is the most influential and it is dedicated to bringing the wisdom of the religion to the world. Jewish Kabbalists continue to believe that they are able to repair the damage between the upper and lower worlds by detaching the divine light connecting good with evil and that, by observing the commandments, it will lead people from exile to redemption.



An ultra Orthodox Jewish man watches a bonfire during the holiday of Lag B'Omer

doctrine in Hebrew mysticism. It not only drew upon Kabbalah but also pagan religions, western astrology, gnosticism, neoplatonism, tantra and alchemy. By combining different beliefs and thoughts, it promoted a syncretic world view.

Although Hermeticists saw Qabalah's origins in classic Greece rather than Jewish mysticism, Kabbalah found its way into Hermetic tradition from the 15th century. Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa wrote *Three Books of Occult Philosophy* which explored the beliefs of Western Esoterism. It looked at the subjects of ritual magic, spells, ceremonial procedures and Kabbalah among others and approached them from the perspective of a scholar.

Hermetic Qabalah's emphasis was on the power of a magician to make ever so slight alterations in the higher realm, and the cards that made up Tarot replaced the ten sefirot in the Tree of Life. Orphism and Egyptian mythology were added during the 17th century and its influence grew among non-Jewish scholars. They felt it could uncover hidden connections since they believed anything would take the place of the ten spheres and 22 paths of the Tree of Life. It posits that the universe is best understood by numbers and so draws upon the work of Pythagoras.

Even so, Luria's initial influence continues to this day (and that's quite aside from Madonna writing a song called *Isaac* in 2005 which many believed was about him). The Kabbalah Centre, led by Rabbi Philip Berg is the most influential and it is dedicated to bringing the wisdom of the religion to the world. Jewish Kabbalists continue to believe that they are able to

repair the damage between the upper and lower worlds by detaching the divine light connecting good with evil and that, by observing the commandments, it will lead people from exile to redemption.

Syncretism

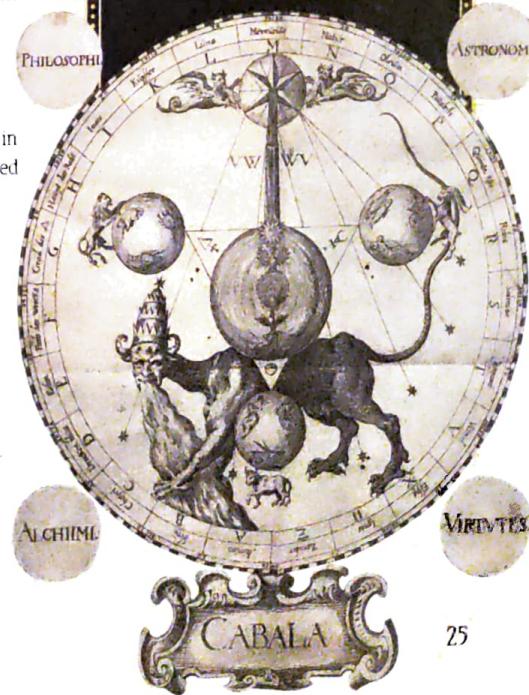
Hermetic Qabalah combined diverse beliefs and blended practices of various schools of thought. In sharing concepts with Jewish Kabbalah and drawing on alchemy, pagan religions, Western astrology, gnosticism and more, it created a new system and was a prime example of what is termed religious syncretism.

Detractors, including Orthodox Christians, say syncretism relies not on the Scriptures but on the whim of humans, drawing on influences affecting a culture. They say it makes a religion illegitimate, but there's a compelling argument that all religions are syncretic to some degree: many pagan symbols, for example, were adopted by Christianity between the second and fourth centuries.

Indeed, the religion of Judaism has also arguably absorbed outside religious influences (Jewish fundamentalists, however, say it has not). Meanwhile, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, an Italian Renaissance nobleman and philosopher, founded the tradition of Christian Kabbalah through a syncretic view of Kabbalah, Hermeticism, Aristotelianism, Platonism and Neoplatonism.

Other syncretistic movements include gnosticism which blends aspects of Oriental mystery religions, the dualistic religion founded in the third century, Manichaeism, and Sikhism which draws on elements of Hinduism and Islam. Aside from religion, it should be noted that syncretism is also common in other expressions of culture, including literature and music.

The 17th-century printmaker Stephan Michelspacher published *Cabala, Spiegel der Kunst und Natur: in Alchymia* in 1615





Nostradamus

One of the most infamous oracles of all time, was Nostradamus a divine prophet or a fraud?

Written by Willow Winsham

Hailed recently as the author of the 'Gospel of Doom for the modern age', Michel de Nostredame—or Nostradamus as he is more commonly known—has had a chequered reputation over the centuries. Born in the French town of Saint Rémy-de-Provence as 1503 came to a close, Nostradamus was one of at least nine children born to a notary father and a mother from who he could claim a family history in medicine. Little could they have suspected, however, that his name would become synonymous with mayhem and catastrophe both during his lifetime and beyond.

Although the details of his life are often disputed, it is generally assumed that Nostradamus began his professional life at the University of Avignon, although this was brought to an abrupt end in 1521 due to the spread of plague to the city. This opened up new horizons for the young man, and, if reports are to be believed, Nostradamus did not waste the time that followed, spending eight years researching herbal remedies as he roamed the countryside. This stood him in good stead for working as an apothecary, a vocation that he took to keenly for several years, providing cures and tinctures for those who came to him in his self-imposed exile.

In 1529, he decided to try again at the university route, and enrolled to study for a doctorate in medicine at the University of Montpellier. This was also to be short-lived, as he was asked to leave when

not only his previous trade as an apothecary was discovered (which was strictly against the rules of the university) but also rumours abounded that he had been speaking out against the medical profession. This lack of formal training did not, however, greatly harm his prospects. In 1531, Nostradamus moved to Agen, married and had two children. Following the death of his wife and children, he continued on with his previous travels. It was during this time that his reputation as a healer of plague was established (although there is little evidence that his attempted cures in either Marseille or his native Salon-de-Provence were successful) before in 1547 he settled once again in his hometown. Here, Nostradamus married for the second and final time, his new wife a widow of wealth who bore him six children during their time together.

Nostradamus's first official dabbling with the occult and connected subjects came in the mid 1500s, when he produced the first of a long run of annual almanacs of predictions and weather forecasts, capitalising on the popularity of this new craze. Nostradamus's work catapulted him into the limelight, and he soon found himself catering for the prestigious, building up a client base that prized his ability to produce personalized predictions. Despite

DEFINING MOMENT

Launched into print

It was through the publication of his annual almanacs that Nostradamus made a name for himself and rose to prominence in the world of prediction and prophecy for which he became so famous, both in his own time and in the centuries since. In total, the yearly almanacs contained nearly 6,500 prophecies, proving immensely popular at the time of publication and paving the way to his later work *on The Prophecies*.

1550



"Nostradamus's work catapulted him into the limelight, and he soon found himself catering for the wealthy and prestigious"

Print
his annual
a name for
the world of
he became so
the centuries
contained
immensely
tion and
work

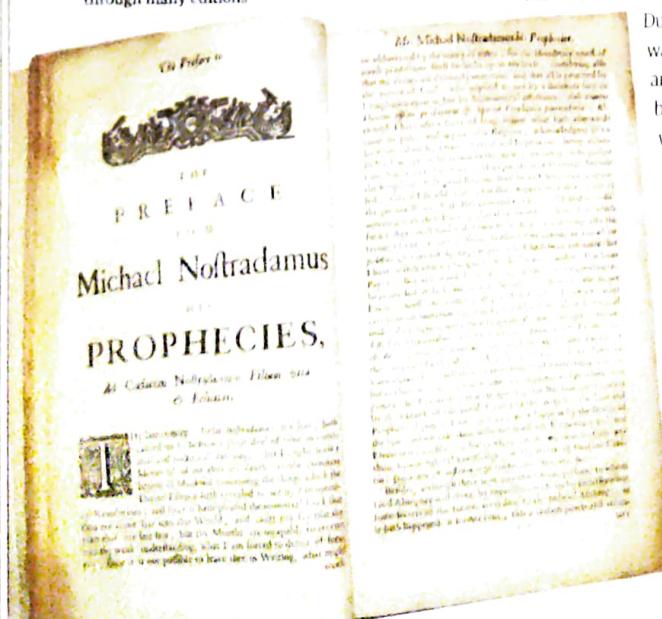


Catherine de Medici was both a patron and fervent believer in the prophecies of Nostradamus.

his reputation as a seer, however, Nostradamus expected his clients to do a lot of the legwork. Whereas a professional astrologer would calculate birth charts himself, Nostradamus requested this information be provided. This was potentially due to a lack of skill and confidence in that area, as the charts that he did produce did not stand up under scrutiny and led to criticism from other astrologers.

As Nostradamus rose to prominence in the world of the mystical and arcane, Catherine de Medici, queen of Henry II of France, also sought out his services. It could be said this was skilfully orchestrated by Nostradamus himself, as a prediction in his almanac for 1555 contained a prediction that hinted at impending danger for the royal family. Understandably worried by this and believing wholeheartedly in the power of such predictions, the queen summoned Nostradamus to Paris in 1556, and during the meeting, commissioned horoscopes for her children, including the future kings of France.

The Prophecies were translated into several languages and went through many editions.



DEFINING MOMENTS

Annual meetings

Nostradamus's initial meeting with Catherine de Medici was to prove profitable at the time and was later to bear further fruit when, a few years on, the queen mother made a point of visiting him in Salon-de-Provence on a royal progress. The roles of king's physician and councillor that were then bestowed on him provided a handsome salary and increased his position.

1668

Nostradamus was said to have predicted the rise of Catherine de Medici's sons to the throne of France.

Charles IX and Henry of Anjou. Nostradamus is said to have predicted the rise of Anjou, something that must have caused great satisfaction for Catherine, especially as her son was at the time only sixth in line to the throne. They met again some years later when Nostradamus was an old man, in his native Salon-de-Provence itself. The royal party of Catherine and Charles IX braved the plague-ridden town to meet the man who Catherine held in such esteem.

During the meeting, Nostradamus was created both a king's physician and a royal councillor, along with being rewarded for his services with 200 écus

Nostradamus was not popular with everyone, however. There were those who denounced him and called him a liar and a fake.

some even went as far as to declare him insane or outright evil. This less than flattering reputation has survived long after his death due to the resurgence of interest in the most popular and famous of Nostradamus's works—the predictions contained in the series of quatrains known as *The Prophecies*. Published in three editions, the last after his death, the quatrains speak in general terms of various types of catastrophes, focusing particularly on natural disasters such as earthquakes, plagues and floods, along with wars, murders and invasions. Some have even credited Nostradamus with predicting numerous pivotal events throughout history, from the Great Fire of London and the French Revolution to the two World Wars, the 9/11 terror attacks and even the death of Princess Diana.

The general vagueness of *The Prophecies*—in most cases the quatrains lack dates entirely, and where

"Nostradamus did not fit the image of a man elected by god to bring his word to the world"



they are mentioned they are used in the most general terms, allows a reader to interpret his words according to their own beliefs and agenda. Indeed, one of the greatest criticisms of the writings of Nostradamus – both from his contemporaries and modern readers – is the general feeling of confusion due to the wordiness and lack of clarity, with more than one client complaining that they could not understand a word that had been written for them. This has been further hindered by the fact that no two editions or even copies in some cases of the quatrains are the same, both printing methods and the translation process have compounded the often-impenetrable nature of his works.

Although heralded as a prophet, Nostradamus did not fit the image of a man elected by god to bring his word to the world, and in fact it was not

a term Nostradamus used in relation to himself; he actually refuted the claim on at least one occasion in print. The label of prophet ascribed to him by his supporters – much like that of doctor, which was used of him on several occasions despite the fact he had never achieved a degree in medicine – did more to enhance his status than hinder it, and it would have been a much less worldly man than Nostradamus who would have spurned the benefits from such an association.

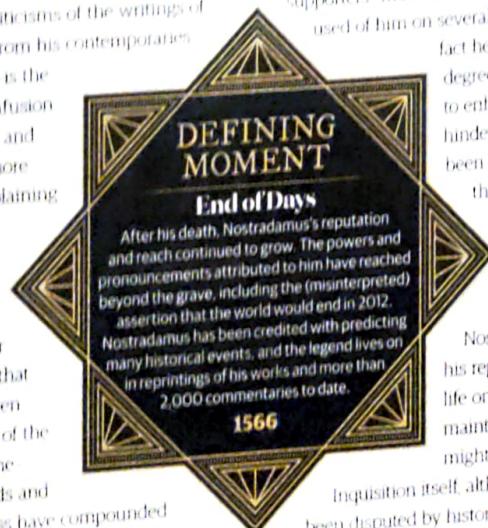
It has been said that

Nostradamus worried for his reputation and even his life on occasion. Some sources maintain that he feared the might and power of the

Inquisition itself, although this has since been disputed by historians, as it was religious differences rather than any occult belief or practice that led to his brief conflict with the Church in Agen in 1538. There have also been several practices

attributed to Nostradamus through the ages to enhance his occult status, with assertions made that he was adept in fire and water gazing. These claims, however, cannot be substantiated by any historical sources, and instead form part of the ever-evolving myth that surrounds Nostradamus. There is also little evidence to support accusations of secret adherence to Protestantism and any hostility towards the Catholic Church; his writings contain no censure of the church and he was favoured by Catholic leaders such as Catherine de Medici, his client base being drawn from a varied mix of Protestant and Catholic backgrounds.

By the mid-1560s, the elderly Nostradamus was not in good health, suffering increasingly from gout and dropsy. Perhaps sensing the end was near, he set his affairs in order, providing for his wife to live comfortably in the event she should remarry and also leaving provision for his children after his death. This was not done a moment too soon; on the night of 1 July 1566, according to legend, Nostradamus went to bed with the chilling prediction to his secretary that he would not be alive come morning. True to his word, he was discovered dead the next day, exactly as he had predicted.



Enlightenment and occultism

Enlightenment was not the triumph of rationality over religion and superstition

Written by Derek Wilson

Not until 1863 did the word 'Enlightenment' come into being to describe certain 18th-century philosophical developments. Moreover, it was originally a term of disapprobation, implying 'shallow and pretentious intellectualism'. The relationship between religion, occultism and science was much more complex than the supposed banishing of all other forms of traditional knowledge and belief by empiricism (i.e. what can be proved by observation and calculation). For example, Sir Isaac Newton (1642-1727), the greatest scientific genius before Einstein, wrote more extensively about the Second Coming of Christ than he did about gravity, and Robert Boyle (1629-1691), the 'father of modern chemistry', left money in his will for annual lectures to be delivered for the defense of Christianity against atheism and other 'errors'. We also need to bear in mind that the major intellectual developments of the period from the early 17th to the late 18th centuries were the result not only of remarkably gifted thinkers, but also of major politico-religious movements in what was a very troubled period of European history. That period began with the Thirty Years' War on the Continent and the

Civil War in Britain. It included religious revival movements on both sides of the Atlantic. It ended with the French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars.

Let us begin in 1610 with the incident often represented as the beginning of the clash between 'religion and science', the papal condemnation of Galileo Galilei (1564-1642). The

Most scholars identify Newton as an Antitrinitarian monotheist—he rejected the doctrine of the Trinity

Italian had long since embraced Copernicus's heliocentric theory—that the Earth moves round the Sun. Copernicus had demonstrated this mathematically, but Galileo had confirmed it by means of observations using his newly developed telescope.

Traditionalists rejected heliocentrism because they were wedded to the long-established physics laid down by the 4th-century BCE philosopher Aristotle and because various Bible references described the movements of heavenly bodies as they appeared from Earth. We still think of the Sun as 'rising' in the East and 'setting' in the West, even though we know that it is actually our planet that moves. To most of our 17th century ancestors it was perfectly obvious that the Sun did the moving. As for Copernicus's apparent contradiction of the Bible, Galileo agreed with a prominent cardinal who observed, 'the Bible teaches us how to go to heaven, not how the heavens go.'

All this would have remained within the realm of scholarly debate had not the pope come down firmly on the side of the traditionalists. He threw the weight of the Church behind the Aristotelian view. What was at stake, therefore, was not a theory of astrophysics, but the authority of the pope. For over 100 years the Catholic church had been under siege from Protestants and other heretics who challenged various aspects of belief and practice. In response, Rome became steadily more obdurate, buttressing its understanding of truth with the threat of condemnation and punishment by the Inquisition. Under these circumstances many church officials who might otherwise have been ready to give Galileo a hearing fell into line with the official Roman verdict. Some of them even refused to look through Galileo's telescope, believing that it must be some kind of magic device designed to seduce them from the truth.

Then, in 1616, Galileo had what seemed to be a stroke of luck. One of his own friends became pope as Urban VIII. He studied Galileo's arguments and instructed him to write a book describing the scholarly debate. The pope made two stipulations: Galileo was only to present heliocentrism as a possible theory. He was also to ensure that Urban's own position was clearly represented. Galileo, therefore, wrote *A Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems*. As the title suggests, the subject was presented as a discussion between a wise Copernican, 'Salviati', and a stupid, obscurantist Aristotelian, 'Simplicio'. It was through the mouth of Simplicio that the author presented Urban's arguments. The pope was furious. He summoned the old man (now in his 70s) back to Rome to face a charge of disobedience. He was found guilty, though three of his judges refused to sign the indictment. He was obliged to confess publicly that he believed

everything taught by Holy Church. He was sentenced to perpetual imprisonment which would likely have killed him off quickly but this was commuted to house arrest in his own house.

About the time that Galileo was clashing with ecclesiastical authority in Italy, on the other side of the Alps a conflict of altogether more terrifying and wide-ranging proportions was taking place. Between about 1626 and 1631 parts of Germany were in the grip of witch mania. Sporadic outbreaks of persecution were not uncommon in both Catholic and Protestant territories. An earlier one in Bonn was described by a contemporary in these words:

"There must be half the city implicated for already professors, law students, pastors, canons, vicars and monks have been arrested and burned... The chancellor and his wife and the private secretary's wife are already executed... Students and boys of noble birth of nine, ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen



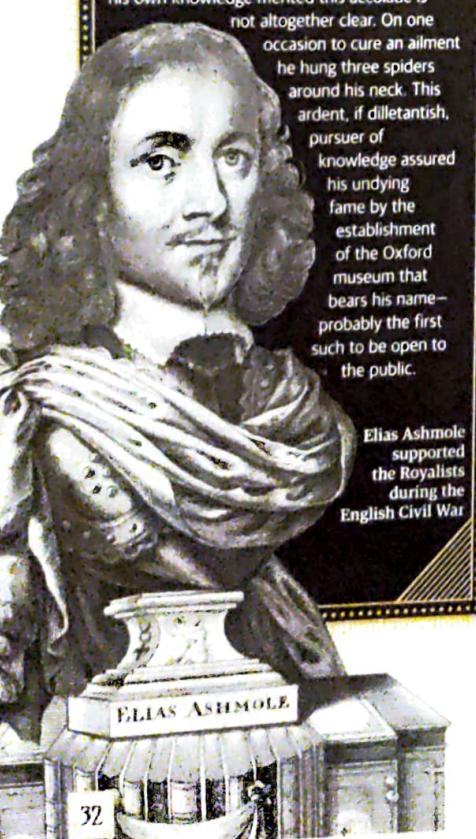
Galileo shows his telescope to the Doge Leonardo Donato

Demons dance in this genre painting by David Rijckaert the Younger

Elias Ashmole

Elias Ashmole (1617-1692) was an example of the educated Englishman whose tastes were Catholic and who cannot, therefore, be pigeon-holed as a friend or enemy of the occult. There were many such. He went to London in 1633, became a solicitor and applied himself assiduously to building a fortune by cultivating the right people. He supported Charles I during the Civil War and joined the royal court in Oxford. There he took the opportunity to extend his education and his wide-ranging studies embraced mathematics, physics, astrology, alchemy and magic. Ashmole was a staunch Church of England man who held all nonconformists in contempt, but he became a Freemason in 1646 and he probably also flirted with Rosicrucianism. When designing his coat of arms he surmounted the shield with an image of the god Mercury supported by figures representing the twin constellation Gemini. His chosen motto, 'Ex Uno Omnia' (All comes from the One), indicated his fascination with the Hermetic tradition. Court favour and financially advantageous marriages enabled him to amass a huge collection of books, prints, coins, medals and curios that he bestowed on the University of Oxford, which, in 1669, awarded him a doctorate in Medicine. How far his own knowledge merited this accolade is not altogether clear. On one occasion to cure an ailment he hung three spiders around his neck. This ardent, if dilletantish, pursuer of knowledge assured his undying fame by the establishment of the Oxford museum that bears his name—probably the first such to be open to the public.

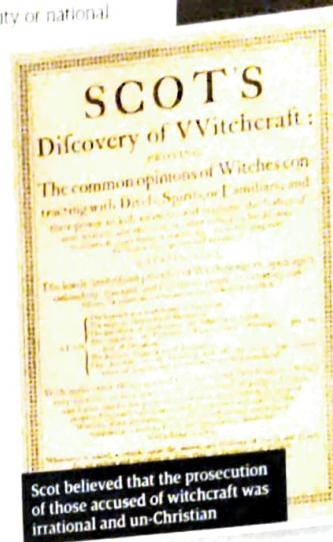
Elias Ashmole supported the Royalists during the English Civil War



fourteen years have been burned. In fine things are in such a pitiful state that one does not know with what people one may talk and associate."

Witch mania is an example of a historical phenomenon that repeats itself over and again in all societies. We might call it the 'them' prejudice. People suffering misfortune frequently look for a scapegoat: the problem is the fault of them. Them may be the Jews, the government, the communists, the EU, foreign immigrants—whatever happens to be the current focus of community or national hatred. In the confusion and terror engendered by the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648), hundreds of towns and cities were destroyed. Farmland was trampled by foraging armies. Millions died from disease and starvation as well as military combat. Germany lost a quarter of its population. With such manifest evils stalking the land it is not altogether surprising that sufferers looked for scapegoats and sought to purge their communities of them.

Folklore provided lurid descriptions of black magicians and their activities. It was widely believed that Satan summoned witches and wizards to attend 'sabats' where blasphemous travesties of Christian worship were enacted and sacrifices were offered. Those called to such assemblies flew through the air to be present. None of this had any part in Christian doctrine but, since the Bible endorsed belief in spiritual conflict between the powers of good and evil, little, if anything, was done by church authorities to challenge such stories. Among the intelligentsia opinions were divided. Some men of science, such as Robert Boyle, accepted the common conviction that witches existed and were in league with the devil. But there was a growing scepticism, not only about the more bizarre accounts of occult activity, but also about the very existence of witchcraft. Samuel Harsnett (1561-1631), a cleric who eventually rose to be Archbishop of York, wrote a treatise condemning clergy who carried out exorcisms. He gave it as his opinion that people who 'have their brains baited and their fancies distempered with the imaginations and apprehensions of Witches, Conjurors, and Fairies, and all that Lymphatical Chimera, I find



Scot believed that the prosecution of those accused of witchcraft was irrational and un-Christian

to be marshalled in one of these five ranks: Children, Fools, Women, Cowards, sick or black melancholic, discomposed wits."

Other critics, while debunking the more lurid accounts of occult activity, were cautious about declaring that witchcraft did not actually exist. Not only were they anxious to avoid being tarred as heretics, they also did not want to be seen as at odds with the law, for most European states had anti-witchcraft legislation in place.

Then again, the prevailing philosophical framework in which post-Renaissance debate took place made it difficult for radical thinkers to deny the possibility of magic.

Neo-Platonic metaphysics taught the interconnectedness of the physical and spiritual realms and sought ways of harnessing the powers latent in the cosmos. It took the better part of two centuries for a new rationale regarding the occult to become firmly established among the leaders of society and to bring all witchcraft prosecutions to an end.

Matthew Hopkins, the Witchfinder General, may have been responsible for the deaths of hundreds of women

The laying of a new philosophical ground plan was undertaken by thinkers trying to arrive at a logically acceptable concept of God in a Europe where Catholics and Protestants were zealously slaughtering each other. As early as 1584, a down-to-earth Kentish gentleman called Reginald Scot had debunked the whole idea of malevolent magical powers on religious grounds. In his *Discovery of Witchcraft* he argued that an



Francisco de Goya paints a witches' sabbath, attended by a he-goat

all-powerful God would not allow any human agent to exercise spiritual powers. Witches, Scot claimed, belonged to one of four categories. Some were innocent victims of malevolent neighbours. Some were self-deluded. Some were deliberate fraudsters, making money from phoney charms and potions. The rest were genuine—that is, they sought to inflict harm by supernatural means but any success they achieved was attributable to chance or to sinister means, such as poison or what we would now call auto-suggestion. Scot's scepticism gradually gained ground among thinking people. What is surprising, from a modern viewpoint, is that it took so long.

In the 17th century a new brand of philosophers emerged who applied their own kind of solvents to the common belief in black magic. Men like René Descartes (1596-1650), Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) and Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677) were all pondering the existence and nature of God and coming to very different conclusions. The common ground they shared was a 'mechanistic' concept of the universe. However it came into being, it operated according to strict rules. Those rules were informative about the one who devised them (if, indeed, such a being existed). One by-product of this understanding of the cosmos was that it could not be changed from within—that is to say that no human being can manipulate it, perform miracles or cast effective spells. In other words, there are no such things as witches or wizards or cunning men or whatever fanciful name

"There was a growing scepticism... about the very existence of witchcraft"

might be claimed by or attributed to persons thought to possess spiritual powers.

Nothing better illustrates the changing mood of the times than the trial of Jane Wenham in 1712. Jane, a widow of Walken, Hertfordshire was denounced by some of her neighbours—in turn, egged on by local clergy—who accused her of various malicious acts. She was tried at Hertford Assizes before Sir John Powell, who fell over backwards to steer the jury towards an acquittal. When the jury brought in a guilty verdict the judge had no alternative but to give the sentence of death by hanging. However, he immediately applied to the Crown in person for a pardon, which was immediately granted. This resulted in a frenzied pamphlet war between accusers and defenders of the clergy involved in the case. One writer who

published anonymously (probably to avoid accusations of atheism)



Pope Urban VIII was a close friend of scientist Galileo Galilei



"People were ready to believe anything"

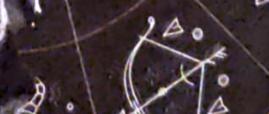
Horoscopes

Having a horoscope prepared by an astrologer was a luxury that only the wealthy could afford—until the spread of printed periodicals. Canny publishers realized that a huge market existed among people who wanted predictions about their future or advice on the most propitious time to undertake a venture. They began to produce almanacs and it is calculated that, by 1650, over 400,000 of these cheap handbooks were being sold annually in England. Almanacs provided a variety of information, from important dates to medical advice, from astronomical details to predictions. They varied in quality. Some were produced by leading astronomers/astrologers, such as the Danish scholar Tycho Brahe. Others were catchpenny, sensationalist offerings deliberately exploiting the gullible. It was almanacs that now made popular the predictions of ancient soothsayers. The legendary prophecies of Merlin, written in the 12th century by Geoffrey of Monmouth, were retold and made to apply to current or imminent events, as were the sayings of Mother Shipton, a 16th century Yorkshire soothsayer. The most famous seer was the French physician and astrologer, Nostradamus (1503–1566), a serious scholar who, from his study of many ancient texts as well as the apocalyptic books of the Bible, made obscurely worded predictions that readers turned to eagerly to discover what fate had in store for them. In such a turbulent era people were ready to believe anything.

This statue of Mother Shipton stands in Knaresborough town center.

Tycho Brahe's research in medicine and alchemy was strongly influenced by the works of Paracelsus

TAURUS ARIES



AGITTARIUS



pointed out that human beings were able to change the rules governing nature, but certainly not by invoking demons.

"Not only our wits, crafts have been banished, but all arts and sciences have been greatly improved. Our buildings are much more built and easier kept in repair and yet more cheaply. Our gardens and orchards are stocked with new and nobler fruits and fields and woods with useful trees. Many of our lands that were almost useless are loaded with new kinds of grass and roots. by better understanding the improvement of the soil. Physic and surgery are new modelled and improved, for the lengthening out of life increase. The farthest planets are brought near and their motions wonderfully accounted for. All arts are improved. God is seen and admired in his works, and the honour of religion no ways lessened."

(A Letter from a Physician in Hertfordshire to his Friend in London)

That vision of a Utopian world might not have convinced everyone who read it, but it did make the point that humanity could abandon magic without abandoning God. England was one of the first nations to put an end to witchcraft trials. Though unofficial lynchings did sometimes occur, the last legal conviction took place in 1716. It would be another 66 years before the last European state (Switzerland) abandoned witchcraft prosecution.

The author of *A Letter from a Physician* cited the diffusion of scientific knowledge as a fundamental reason for the overcoming of superstition and the greater wellbeing of society. There was much truth in this assertion. One of the hidden revolutions that took place in the second half of the 17th century was that education became fashionable. Between the end of the Thirty Years' War and the beginning of the Napoleonic Wars, Europe enjoyed a century and a half of relative peace. This enabled the more affluent members of society to concentrate on acquiring the arts of civilized living. This was the age of the Grand Tour. The scions of wealthy English families were despatched to the Continent for three years or so to learn foreign languages, discover foreign cultures and study with some of the leading intellectuals of the age. The more inquisitive and acquisitive travellers returned with cartloads (sometimes shiploads) of souvenirs—paintings, sculptures, books, various scientific specimens—with which to adorn their mansions and impress their friends.

A parallel development was the foundation of academies where gentlemen of leisure met to discuss all aspects of science and the arts. In 1635 the Parisian Academy was established and, in 1666, this developed into the French Academy of Sciences. In 1662 the Royal Society of London for Improving Natural Knowledge came into being.

and, as the name indicates, it enjoyed active royal patronage from the new king, Charles II. Similar learned bodies were set up in Berlin and other European centers. Here members delivered lectures, debated and performed experiments. They wrote reports of their proceedings, which were circulated to other members of this intellectual elite throughout Europe.

But such societies did not only exist in major cities. Leaders of rural society who liked to think of themselves as cultured set up regional debating societies. For example, in 1710 certain Lincolnshire gentlemen and clergy established The Society of Gentlemen for the Supporting of Mutual Benevolence and Their Improvement in the Liberal Sciences and in Polite Learning. Among those invited to address its meetings were Sir Isaac Newton, Sir Hans Sloane (the president of the Royal Society, whose collection later formed the nucleus of the British Museum), the Rev William Stukeley (an antiquarian and celebrated archaeological pioneer of both the Stonehenge and Avebury excavations), and the poets Alexander Pope and John Gay. Also significant is the fact that among the Spalding Society's founder members was the Rector of Epworth, one Samuel Wesley, father of John and Charles Wesley, the founders of the Methodist movement.

**The Royal Society's motto
'Nullius in verba'
is taken to mean
'take nobody's
word for it'**

We now associate the Wesley brothers with the religious revival of the mid 18th century (together with its sister movement, the Great Awakening, led by George Whitefield in North America).

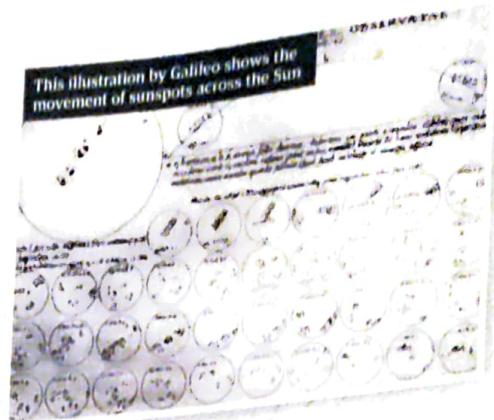
but this does not mean that they were ignorant of or anti-pathetic to advances in science. On the contrary, John Wesley avidly read the writings of Robert Boyle, John Locke and Sir Isaac Newton. Of Newton he wrote that he 'carried the lamp of knowledge into paths ... that had been unexplored before.'

Just as for Wesley there was no gulf between religion and science, so for Newton, who was President of the Royal Society from 1703 to 1727, there was no divide between science, religion and occultism. For this polymath all aspects of the unknown were ripe for investigation. He devoted years to the study of alchemy. Among his voluminous unpublished papers there appear more than 50,000 words on the manufacture of the philosopher's stone, supposedly able to turn base metals into gold.

But his investigations went beyond the study of transmutation. He was concerned to know how chemical substances were formed and what they were made of (what we would now call their molecular structure). In pursuit of such knowledge he did not hesitate to communicate with clandestine, pseudo-magical communities frowned upon by the rest of the scientific fraternity. Newton's knowledge of the Bible was prodigious and his approach to theology was just as individualistic as his reflections on pure science. For instance, he abandoned an early resolve to seek ordination because he discovered that he could no longer believe in the Trinity.

Social and political developments in the 18th century were fundamental to changes of attitude regarding the occult. The widening educational gap between upper and lower classes meant that working people in rural communities tended to cling longer to traditional beliefs. This explains, for example, why learned judges and doctors found themselves at odds with the stubborn witch beliefs of simple villagers. But the beginnings of industrialisation changed the demographic of many areas. People were drawn to the cities in search of work and left behind their rural

This illustration by Galileo shows the movement of sunspots across the Sun



communities and the folklore that lurked therein. This is an underlying reason for the gradual fading of occult beliefs among the lower orders of society.

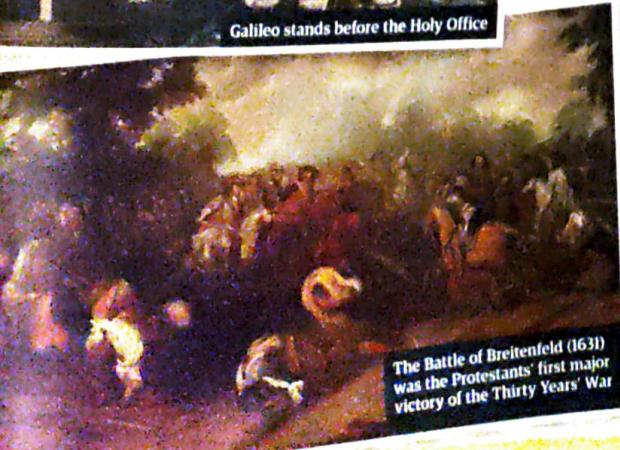
At the same time, philosophers and their wealthy patrons were directing their thinking away from speculation about the supernatural and towards the solving of political problems. King Louis XV of France (1710-1774) is credited with the prophetic utterance, *'Après moi le déluge'*. The old order, headed by absolute monarchs like himself, was under threat from revolutionary forces – and from philosophers who challenged the political principles upon which the concept of a semi-divine hereditary monarchy rested.

Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), John Locke (1632-1704), and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1788) were among the leading thinkers who explored the concept of the 'social contract' and the issue of political power. Was it top down, invested by God in chosen leaders – monarchs and aristocrats – or bottom-up, residing in the people, who had the right to choose their own governors? Radical thinking gave some sort of rationale to revolutionary activists.

In 1776 American colonists severed ties with Britain. In 1789 the French Revolution broke out. King Louis XVI was executed. France became a republic and found itself at war with the other major European powers. The decades of comparative peace were over. The Continent – and, indeed, the world – was entering an entirely new era of warfare. There would be new battles to be fought on the ground and new arguments to be aired in the sanctuums of the philosophers.



Galileo stands before the Holy Office



The Battle of Breitenfeld (1631)
was the Protestants' first major
victory of the Thirty Years' War

Palmistry

You can tell a lot from a person's face, and even more from their hands if you just so happen to be a skilled chirologist...

Written by Poppy-Jay Palmer

Also known as chiromancy, palmistry is the ancient palm-reading divination practice that is still being used today. Those who practice palmistry are usually called palmists, hand readers, hand analysts or chirologists. Unlike other divinatory arts, interpretations of the palm tend to differ across different schools of palmistry. Add that to the fact that there has always been a big lack of evidence as to whether palmistry predictions are

accurate, and you can see why this led to the art being viewed as a pseudoscience by academics.

Through examining palms, chirologists are supposedly able to evaluate a person's character or future life. They look at the lines on the palm and determine what they mean based on their size, quality, and what their intersections look like. Sometimes the divination extends to looking at fingers, hand flexibility, skin patterns, also known as dermatoglyphics, and more. Even a person's hand shape can determine their future, and these

are classified by one of four groups: earth (usually broad, with coarse skin), air (square with long fingers), water (long, oval-shaped palm with long fingers), and fire (square, with flushed skin and short fingers).

The main section of a reading, however, is based around the lines found on almost all hands: the heart line, found towards the top of the palm and linked to love and attraction; the head line, starting at the edge of the palm under the index finger and flowing to the other edge, linked to intellectualism, learning and communication style and knowledge; and the life line, which starts at the end of the palm above the thumb and flows to just above the wrist, and is linked to vitality, physical health and wellbeing and, in ancient times, a person's lifespan.

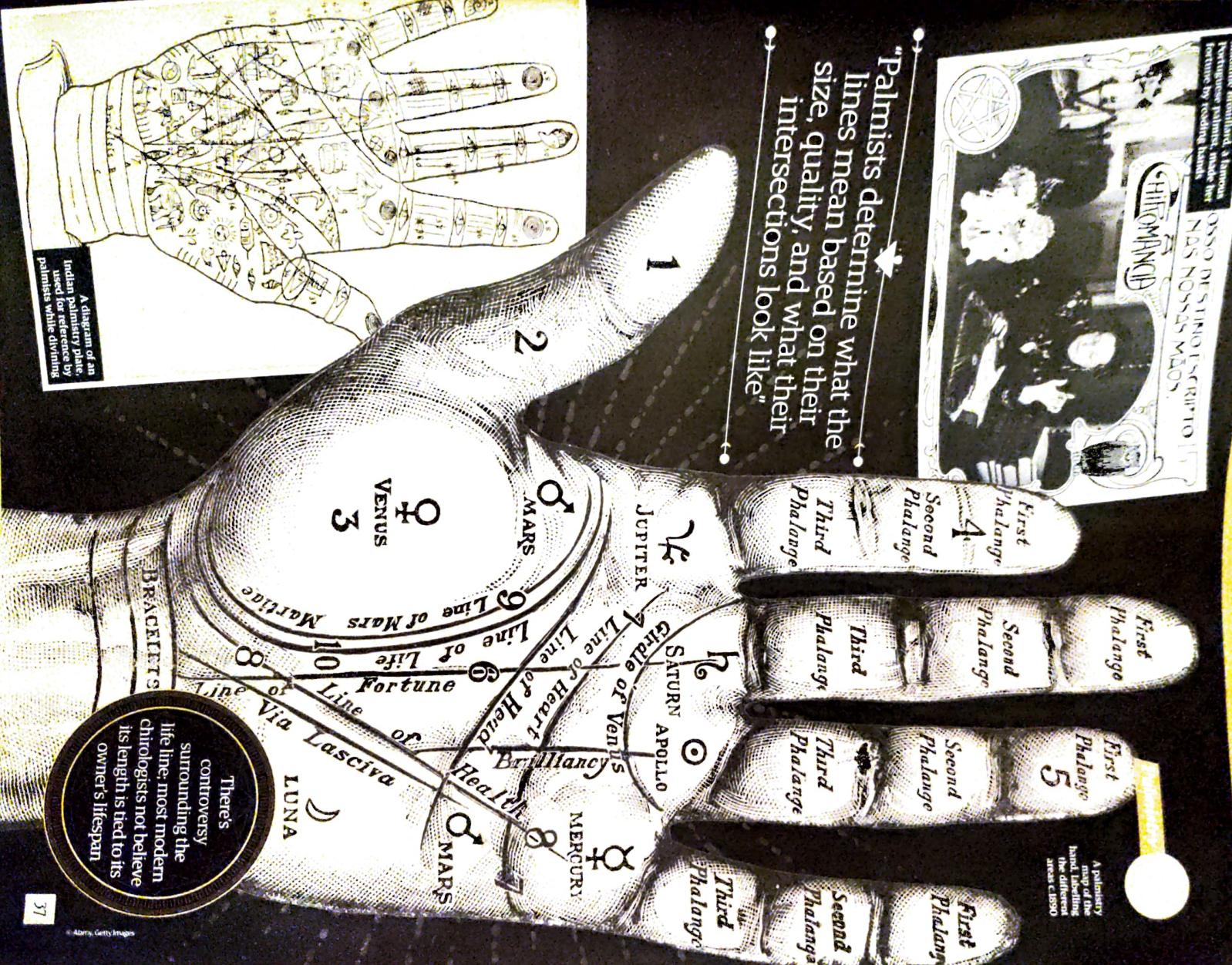
Though palmistry is practiced all over the world, it has always been most commonly used on the Eurasian landmass, particularly in India, Nepal, Tibet, Persia, China, Sumer, Babylon, Mesopotamia and historic Palestine. Many people believe palmistry began in ancient India and spread from there, but the exact origins of the art are now unknown. However, through moving across countries and cultures, it also developed a lot, especially in ancient Greece.

By medieval times, palmistry was practiced by witch-hunters, who saw uneven pigmentation and black spots on the palm as a sign of making a deal with the Devil. It began to be suppressed by the Catholic Church, which saw it as a pagan superstition. By the Renaissance, it made a comeback in the magical world, but was still classified as a 'forbidden art'.



A chirologist looks for omens of the future in artist Jean Broc's 1819 piece 'La Disease de bonne aventure'

The other 'forbidden arts' were necromancy, geomancy, aeromancy, pyromancy, hydromancy and scapulimancy



A diagram of an Indian palmistry plate, used for reference by palmists while divining.

surrounding the life line: most modern chirologists not believe its length is tied to its owner's lifespan.

The ghoul next door

Revered and feared in villages across Europe, cunning folk and their magic were part of everyday life until a new move against witches led many to their deaths

Written by June Woolerton

When Isobel Sinclair admitted she had talked to fairies as she tried to protect cattle from harm on Hallowe'en with a sheet and some hair, she sealed her fate. The Scottish woman was hanged as a witch soon after her trial in 1633. But just a century earlier she might have gone unharmed, even unnoticed. For Isobel was following a path that thousands of men and women had taken for centuries. White witches, also called cunning or wise folk, had been an integral part of many God fearing communities since Roman times. They made cures, gave advice and offered protection to people and their livelihoods. But as organized religion changed and fear of witchcraft spread in the 16th and 17th centuries the thin line between their practices and the darker arts of black witchcraft blurred, and soon the places they had once called home were no place for the ghoul next door.

Magic was so widely practiced in Tudor England that leading cleric Bishop Hugh Latimer warned openly in 1552 that 'a great many of us when we be in trouble or sickness or lose anything, we run hither and thither to witches, or sorcerers, whom we call wise men.' Just about everyone knew

where to find a witch or cunning person to help them with their problems. It was no different across Europe. The wise folk were a fixture in their communities, inspiring both respect and fear. And in an age when science could offer little explanation for anything, their wisdom held power

The position was open to anyone although some people were believed to be born with special powers. Seventh sons of seventh sons were said to be able to cure goitre and scrofula. There was also a belief that special powers could be inherited or passed on from one cunning person to their chosen successor. But anyone who wanted to learn magic and was willing to try it could acquire a reputation as one of the cunning folk. The range of people practising magic can be seen in the convictions secured in Rouen in France in 1605 when shepherds,

apothecaries and labourers were all found guilty of being witches. The cunning folk came from all walks of life and often lived in the very heart of their communities.

Whether their spells worked wasn't really the issue. Once someone was known as a wise man or woman, they would find themselves consulted on a regular basis. Often they did it for prestige rather than to get rich. Many cunning folk earned very little from their magic and many kept prices low.

Potions made of urine and hair were made for protection against witches, who would suffer pain if the bottle was buried or burned





Fear of witches increased greatly in Germany in the 15th and 16th centuries. This depiction by Hans Baldung shows many of the grotesque behaviors female witches were believed to take part in.

to make sure they undercut business rivals. Even when they used their powers for good, cunning folk attracted suspicion and stuck to minimal charges to avoid being accused of fraud or trying to con vulnerable people out of cash. Some refused to take money at all. Ann Jefferies, a teenage servant in Cornwall, fell seriously ill in 1645 and on her recovery said she had been visited by fairies during her sickness. She soon gained a reputation for being able to cure by touch but despite becoming a local celebrity, she always refused payment.

It's no surprise her skills were in such demand. Cunning folk were often consulted for cures for both people and animals. They used spells and charms which held their own against the less-than-sophisticated medicine of the day in terms of popularity. Common practices included mumbling words over the patient or placing scribbled messages on them. Often these derived from old Latin phrases which the witch's mostly illiterate clients couldn't read. Some of the charms contained a form of prayer. Jane Howe from Somerset wrote down some

"What a witch said held sway, and much of their influence came from fear"

of the methods she knew including one used to stop bleeding which ended by calling for a divine blessing. Curing by touch was popular across Europe, as was the use of herbs and plants. Here the white witch's practices were close to traditional medicine which also relied on potions to cure. The cunning folk always ascribed their cures to magic. And they were always at pains to point out that they had to be involved in the treatment if a way to stand any chance of success.

Witches were also asked for help in resolving crime, including the return of stolen goods.

Sometimes they were reported to do this by showing their clients the image of the criminal in a glass or mirror or by using a crystal ball to identify them. Often, the very knowledge that the local cunning man or woman had been consulted was enough in itself to spur the thief into handing back what had been taken, for their powers were, when used for good, inspired fear. Usually, a condition of helping

was that the wrongdoer escaped any punishment. What a white witch said held sway, and much of their influence in the local community came from fear. After all, they were known for their powers which many believed could cure illness and tell the future. No one wanted to be on the receiving end of those skills if they were turned on them in revenge.

Love magic was also popular, with white witches consulted to help bring about a marriage or reinvigorate a relationship that had gone off the boil. Wise women were widely consulted on pregnancy and childbirth, attending deliveries and staying with mothers afterwards. White witches were also believed to be able to detect other witches whose intentions were harmful. Illness at the time could be seen as a sign of being bewitched and as well as asking for a cure, the client of the cunning folk might also want to discover who was doing them harm. The white witch rarely named a suspect. Instead, they would offer instructions on rituals which they said would draw the perpetrator to the victim's house, or they would tell them that the person they met at a particular time was

In Essex in the late 16th century, witchcraft had become the second most common criminal charge after theft

Why witches were usually women

Usually old, sometimes ugly, often female. The witch of children's fairytales still lingers as a stereotype today. Court records show that across Europe the majority of those tried as witches were women even though white witches and cunning folk were just as likely to be men. However, as the Church became more intent on stamping out all forms of heresy, women became the main focus of witch hunts.

From the 15th century onwards women were seen as increasingly vulnerable to the temptations of magic. They were viewed as sex mad and seriously stupid by many, and clerics writing on demonology described lust-filled women who were seduced into evil by the Devil and took part in unholy orgies.

Later reformers took an equally dim view. For Martin Luther, women were so weak that they were easily

won over by the promises of magic. In the 16th and 17th centuries, witches were nearly always women and any men caught in the act were usually seen to have been tempted over to darkness by a wicked woman. But when the wave of persecutions ended and witchcraft was no longer pursued through the courts, the wise folk recorded in local communities once more featured men as well as women.



the guilty party. But in the late 16th and early 17th centuries, it was the white witch who was increasingly at risk of capture.

Attitudes to all forms of magic had been changing rapidly since the 1400s. The early Christian Church called both magic and witchcraft delusions. But during the Middle Ages, clerics turned their attention to witchcraft again. The German churchman, Heinrich Kramer, saw witches as a real threat to society and to the souls of his congregation. His *Malleus Maleficarum*, published in 1487, insisted that witchcraft was real and a heresy. It would influence attitudes for three hundred years. Kramer wanted witches hunted down, tortured if need be to extract confessions and put to death. Black witches, who used magic to harm others, were liable to arrest already. But now

the idea began to take hold that all witches were wrong. Their powers came under suspicion and they were increasingly seen as agents of the Devil, in league with demons and taking part in dreadful rituals.

Within decades, clerics in southern Germany had started often large-scale witch hunts which then spread to other countries. In Trier, a series of persecutions under Archbishop Johann VII von Schonenberg at the end of the century left two villages with just two residents—the rest had been executed as witches. In

Lorraine, the judge Nicholas Rémy claimed he had sentenced 900 witches to death in just ten years. Court records show that many of those accused were originally suspected because they carried out what had previously been thought of as everyday magic. Under duress

White witches or cunning folk were called many other names, including wizard, blessing witch, enchanter and charmer

Love magic was performed by white witches and cunning folk.



or through fear, many confessed to darker forms of witchcraft. Sometimes those who admitted to being a witch went on to point the finger at others. In 1582, Ursula Kemp was arrested in St Osyth in Essex and admitted using witchcraft to kill a child and her own sister in law. She then accused others of being witches—several went on to confess to gruesome crimes after their arrests.

Hysteria around witchcraft began to build across Europe. Jobs that had been the preserve of the respected wise woman, like midwifery, became a target for persecutions especially as beliefs grew that witches used fat from children to make flying ointments. In 1669, a 67-year-old lying-in maid called Anna Ebeler was hanged in Augsburg in Germany after being accused of killing a new mother with a bowl of soup. In England, witchfinders began to appear. These self-appointed justices would visit different towns and, for a set fee, root out supposed witches who were then handed over to the courts.

The witch hunts across Europe in the 16th and 17th century are believed to have led to at least 40,000 documented executions. Many more are thought to have died while in prison awaiting trial or to have taken their own lives through fear. By the 18th century, witchcraft began to fade from criminal records, but the Enlightenment also meant that many of the old practices that had got white witches into so much trouble had lost their sway with people. Old wives' tales and folklore still exist, but they are just echoes of a time when they gave real power to the ghoul next door.

Home of a cunning woman

The tools of the trade for a folk healer England, 17th century

Cunning-folk were in existence from at least the 14th century, but by the 17th century they were a staple part of English life. Considered a blessing by those who used their services and a plague by social commentators of the day, it was estimated that one could not go more than ten miles without coming across a practicing cunning-man or woman in some parts of England, meaning most would have met one at some point.

Well known for their healing skills, they were often called on during times of sickness. Love magic was also particularly popular, with curious young women wanting help conceiving or to know the identity of a future husband. Others came wanting help identifying a thief and recovering stolen property, and even, in some cases, locating hidden treasures. Although often lumped together with witches, cunning-folk were actually the anti-witch, and one of their most called upon skills was that of diagnosing bewitchment and un-witching the victims.

Unlike witches, cunning-folk were never pursued with any great enthusiasm by authorities, and although some of their practices, such as the location of treasure, were punishable under witchcraft legislation, they were never prosecuted in great numbers. The line between cunning-woman and witch was sometimes thin, however, and there was little help for those against whom popular opinion turned.

How do we know this?

Sources for the work and activities of cunning-folk from the 16th century onwards are varied and sometimes conflicting. Commentators of the day such as Reginald Scot, John Melton and Thomas Cooper among others gave their personal experience and opinions on the cunning-folk operating in their areas, and while these can be contradictory and colored by personal opinion, there is also evidence from court records, newspaper and pamphlet accounts that provide a wealth of information on these characters.

Important texts

The majority of cunning-folk were literate to some degree and clients would expect them to have a variety of books or grimoires ready to be consulted. In reality, it was not guaranteed that the cunning folk would understand more than a fraction of what they contained. These texts, often in Latin and containing various symbols and diagrams, ranged from the mathematical to religious books such as the Bible.



Mirror or glass

A successful cunning woman knew how to get her clients to do the work for them; to identify a thief or person who had bewitched them, the cunning person would ask the afflicted to look into a reflective surface and say what or who they saw there. This was particularly successful if the client already had a preconceived idea of who might want to cause them harm.

Witch bottle

Considered safer than confronting a suspected witch, this was a service that a cunning woman could provide after diagnosing bewitchment. The bottle, often made from stoneware, would be filled with urine, hair and nail clippings from the victim, along with pins, thorns or iron nails. It was sealed then buried or heated, the aim to cause pain to the witch, forcing them to break their hold on the victim.

Written charms

Cunning-women were often called upon to provide charms to protect and ward off trouble, frequently provided in a written form. Ranging in complexity from a short popular section of one of the gospels to more elaborate pleas for protection, these were worn on the person or concealed about the home. If a person was guilty, thereby identifying the culprit.

Bible and key

A popular method used by a cunning-woman to identify a thief or wrong-doer for a client: the names of several suspects were written on paper and put in turn into the end of a key. The key was then placed on an open page of the Bible (often the first psalm) and the verse read out loud. The book and key would turn if the named person was guilty, thereby identifying the culprit.

Herbs and plants

A staple in the cunning woman's arsenal, these had many applications in her daily work. Herbs were used as a straightforward cure for a client seeking help after conventional medicine had failed, and in addition, those such as St. John's wort, rosemary, sage and bay were commonly used to counteract a bewitched item.

Robes

Many cunning people, whether by accident or design, clearly looked the part they played and references are made to their outlandish appearance and clothing. Some popular cunning folk were known for wearing robes adorned with strange signs and symbols, while others were known for eccentric hats and other distinctive accessories.

Payment

Unlike standard charmers, the cunning woman was running a business, receiving payment in either money or kind for their services. Fortune telling brought in a few pence a time, whereas theft detection could be charged at several shillings depending on what was being located.

Sign of other occupation

Most cunning-folk had a mundane occupation alongside their magical work. Far from being the case that she could not support herself through this, the cunning-woman's work could be more lucrative than their traditional employment, which was often kept up to maintain respectability.

How do we know this?

Sources for the work and activities of cunning folk from the 16th century onwards are varied and sometimes conflicting. Commentaries of the day such as Reginald Scot, John Melton and Thomas Cooper among others gave their personal experience and opinions on the cunning-folk operating in their areas, and while these can be contradictory and colored by personal opinion, there is also evidence from court records, newspaper and pamphlet accounts that provide a wealth of information on these characters.

Sieve and shears

One popular request of the local cunning woman was for help to locate either lost or stolen property or, more ambitiously, the location of hidden treasure. The sieve and shears was a common method used for these tasks. The sieve was balanced atop the points of the shears, and the question of the guilty or otherwise of several people asked in turn. At the name of the thief, the sieve would spin and identify the culprit.

The Witch's Spellbook

Witches have recorded their spells and incantations and referred to them throughout history as ancient texts survive to influence modern practices

Written by Mike Haskew

Since the concepts and practice of witchcraft date to classical antiquity, it follows reasonably that those who have concocted potions, chanted incantations, and cast spells throughout history should record their methods and makings for themselves and future generations.

While accused witches of the Middle Ages and early modern period were convenient scapegoats, targets for hunters who used them to explain the origins of famine, pestilence, disease, and other misfortune, they evidently were literate, capable of either reading and writing or availing themselves of scribes or associates who performed these services. It is estimated that roughly 80 percent of accused witches in 16th-18th-century Europe were women, often old, poor and sometimes unattractive in appearance. Remarkably, so-called witches were also pioneers in medicine, chemistry, and other disciplines who managed to preserve their knowledge— their witchcraft—in writing.

Ancient Egyptians and Greeks laid down liturgy and literature on papyrus, referencing spells that required “an offering of frankincense” or the placing of an “uncorrupted and pure” child in a trance.

before a glowing fire. Dating to the 11th century, the *Picatrix* was originally written in Arabic, confirming the precept that witchcraft transcends cultural boundaries, and its more than 400 pages include some concoctions with disgusting ingredients along with spells, focusing on astrological energy in the pursuit of knowledge and power. Similarly, the *Galdrabók* originated in Iceland in the 16th century and contains contributions from numerous witches. Its 47 spells include runes purported to harbour supernatural attributes, and much of its content relates to physical healing for such conditions as fatigue, headaches, sleeplessness, as well as childbirth pain.

Although its exact date of origin is unknown, *The Sworn Book of Honorius* is verified to have existed during the 14th century. Its oldest preserved

manuscript dates to 1347. The work opens with a stinging rebuke of the Roman Catholic church, and its text that supposedly assists in the practice of necromancy, or communication with the dead. Witchcraft lore explicitly specifies that only three copies of *The Sworn Book of Honorius* can be produced, that anyone who possesses one of these and is unable to find a suitable heir must take the text to their grave, and that those who ascribe to its teachings are required to refrain from keeping company with women.

Tangible evidence points to a substantial body of written witchcraft teachings that span the period from ancient times through the early modern period. Many of these have been exhaustively studied both for their genuine original purpose and their historical significance.

“Witches were pioneers in medicine, chemistry, and other disciplines who managed to preserve their knowledge in writing”



This image of a witch's talisman appears in a famous grimoire titled the *Black Pullet*

Visions and mysterious volumes

Spellbooks come in all shapes and sizes, from leechbooks dealing with common maladies, to grimoires instructing how to summon demons

The body of written texts associated with witchcraft varies widely and includes books of magic spells called grimoires, medieval Anglo-Saxon medical tomes called leechbooks, and volumes of cryptic symbols known as sigils that have often been associated with sorcery, or otherwise serve as the signature of—or way to invoke—a demon.

The grimoire is a general handbook for witches, and its origin is nearly as old as the practice itself. Grimoires include spells, incantations, instructions for making talismans and amulets, and procedures for summoning angels, demons, and other worldly spirits. The earliest grimoires are believed to have been produced in ancient Mesopotamia and predate the 4th century BCE. An essential component of a witch's book, they have been produced across millennia, and the books themselves have at times been considered sources of supernatural power and strength.

One of the most famous grimoires is the *Key of Solomon*, which some have claimed to be

authored by King Solomon himself. However, the work more likely dates to 14th century Renaissance Italy. Divided into two books, it exists in numerous translations, some of which contain subtle differences. A work of conjurations and curses, purifications, and other exercises, its content reflects a multi-cultural Islamic, Jewish, and Late Antiquity Greco-Roman influence.

The best-known book of its type, *Bald's Leechbook*, dates to the 9th century, and a single manuscript, housed in the British Library in London, survives. Divided into two sections, the first dealing with external maladies and the second with internal conditions, the leechbook offers practical cures for headaches, shingles, and aching feet.

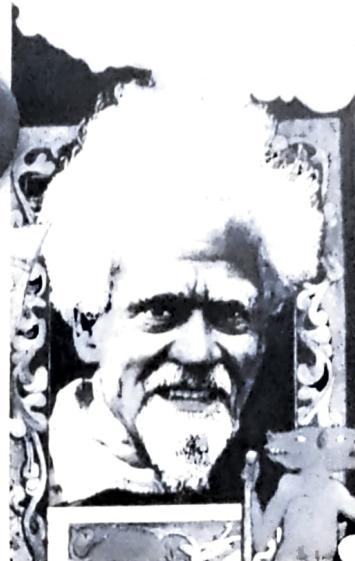
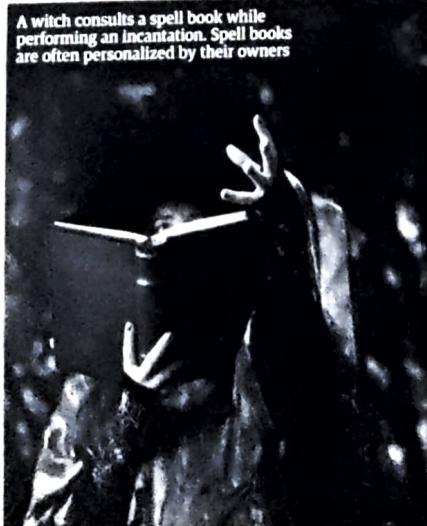
Medieval witches used sigils as representations of angels and demons that they might call upon, and the grimoire *The Lesser Key of Solomon* lists 72 demons representing the hierarchy of hell and their corresponding sigils. Presenting a demon's sigil was thought to provide the witch with some degree of control over it.

The word grimoire comes from a French figure of speech meaning 'hard to understand'

A *Book of Shadows* contains spells, incantations, sigils, and other information vital to practitioners of witchcraft



A witch consults a spell book while performing an incantation. Spell books are often personalized by their owners



A modern grimoire

Sometime during the late 1940s, Gerald Gardner, the acknowledged father of Wicca, wrote his *Book of Shadows*, subsequently introducing it to the members of his Bricket Wood coven. While *Book of Shadows* is a term generally used to describe a witch's personal volume containing their own incantations and rituals, Gardner contended that his book included information he had been given as a member of the New Forest coven decades earlier along with his own contributions.

Although he asserted that sections of the book had their origins in early witchcraft historiography, sections were actually attributable to other books as well, such as the *Key of Solomon*, a text probably from the Renaissance, the *Gospel of the Witches* written by Charles Godfrey Leland and purported to be the religious book of an Italian coven, and from the writings of poet Rudyard Kipling and occult practitioner and magician Aleister Crowley. Doreen Valiente, high priestess of the Bricket Wood coven, made significant alterations to Gardner's book after questioning its authorship.

Gardner stated that witches had been prohibited from putting their rituals and incantations in writing in earlier times due to fear of persecution, but they later began doing so. The publication of Gardner's *Book of Shadows* spurred greater interest in Wicca, and the notion of such books has become a staple of popular culture.

Practising the witch's art

The witch persona revolves around a relationship with the devil and the ability to cast spells, predict the future, heal the sick, and place curses. After their arrest, accused witches were subjected to harsh interrogation and torture. Confessions were extracted under duress, and they were often based strongly on suggestion, ranging from flying on brooms, poles or animals to meetings with the devil involving seduction, debauched ritual sex, and selling of souls in exchange for dark powers. Accused witches were stripped and searched for marks on their bodies, signs the individual was the devil's own.

Witches would cast spells for many purposes, from finding love to improving financial or social position, punishing enemies, and removing warts. Those willing to pay might purchase a spell for a good harvest. Conversely, witches were also accused of murders, including the deaths of children.

During the Middle Ages, a significant climatic cooling period occurred—witches were blamed for crop failures, pandemic disease, and any increases in criminal activity that followed. After the Black Death swept through Europe in the 14th century and decimated villages, the attitude toward witches shifted from curiosity and tolerance to fear and persecution.

Curing any ailments from cancer to halitosis and poison ivy were other common practices undertaken by witches. Simmering the fresh root of a dogtooth violet or the tongue of an

adder in milk and then drinking the concoction supposedly cured stomach ulcers, while an ounce of trailing arbutus leaves in boiling water, taken several times a day, cured kidney stones.

Perhaps the most infamous of England's witch trials was that of the Pendle Witches in Lancashire in the summer of 1612. Nine women and two men were hanged, and the entire affair began with a curse. A young woman either begged or asked to purchase pins from a local peddler. After she was refused, the peddler suffered a stroke. The woman confessed that she had sold her soul to Satan and asked the Devil to cripple the peddler. Curses ranged from simple to complex, involving just a spit of saliva, a written note later burned, clay figures or dolls, or a lengthy ritual spanning several days.

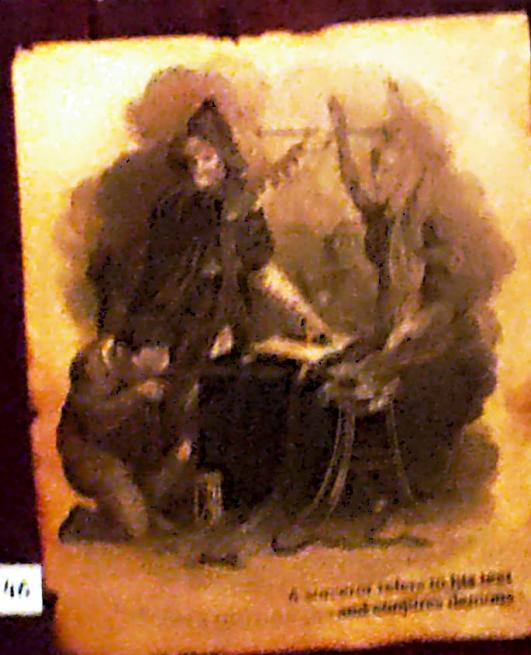
Despite this, witches were consulted for their clairvoyance or precognition. One English witch, Mother Shipton of Knaresborough, Yorkshire, is believed to have predicted the invention of trains, planes, automobiles, and the telegraph centuries before they appeared. Amulets and charms were also believed to be effective protection. Carried or hung in windows, these consisted of bags of herbs, sigils, or miniature everyday items such as nails or horseshoes.

Witches were blamed for anything from crop failures to the sudden death of children

Spells in a Witch's arsenal

- Afflicted neighbour's children with strange symptoms and behavior
- Conjured the spirit of a dead man
- Manipulated the weather to produce rain or snow
- Caused an individual to suffer nightmares
- Cast a love spell to win the heart of a man
- Cursed enemies with continuing bad luck
- Provided protection from diseases
- Rid neighbour of an unwanted husband
- Recovered a lost object
- Silenced a gossip

Witches are blamed for the burning down of a house

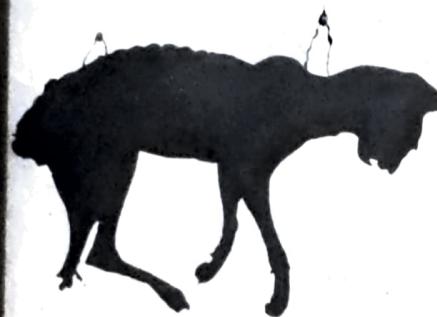




Protection from maleficium

Dead Cat

In Europe the custom of placing a dead cat within the walls of a house persists to this day. While serving as a good luck charm, the cat's remains are also believed by some to repel or lure a witch away from the premises. Although some have asserted that cats were once walled in alive, forensic evidence of dried carcasses suggest that the placement occurred after the animal had died. Dead rodents or birds have been discovered along with the cats as well.



Elf Arrow

The ancient elf arrow, actually an arrowhead made by Neolithic peoples, was believed to have been used by elves to hunt cattle and inflict pains, called elfshot, on humans. However, when recovered they could be used as charms or amulets, often worn around the neck and adorned with silver, to ward off witches. Elf arrows were never to be sought, but were found in unusual places. They were to be protected from sunlight to prevent their falling into the hands of witches and used for evil purposes.



Witch's Seat

Also known as a witch's stone, these were stones that protruded from the chimneys of homes. Their original purpose was probably to prevent water from running into the house between the thatched roof and stone chimney; however, through the years the stones became associated with witches flying about during their returns from meetings with the Devil. They supposedly rested on the seats. In the absence of the stones, the witches might descend the chimney and cause turmoil in the home.

Witch Ball

Typically made of brightly coloured glass, these spherical objects were popularised during the Middle Ages. Early examples were crudely made, but by the 19th century their production was improved with higher-quality glass. Sometimes hung in an eastern window or suspended by a thread, they warded off witches or trapped them inside the orbs. Folk tales suggest that witch balls also protected the dwelling from the curse of the evil eye. The balls were sometimes filled with holy water or salt to increase effectiveness.



Witch Bottle

The witch bottle dates to the 16th century and provided a means of removing a spell cast by an adversarial witch. Sometimes prepared by another witch or folk healer, the witch bottle contained the victim's hair, nail clippings, and urine, and possibly rosemary bent needles and pins, and red wine. Buried at the farthest corner of the victim's property, beneath the hearth, or in some other nondescript location, the witch bottle supposedly irritated the offending witch to the point that they would remove the spell.



Rowan

In Britain the rowan tree was said to be the tree from which the Devil hanged his mother. Planted near the front door of a home or elsewhere on the property, it was considered a powerful deterrent against witches. The physical appearance of the rowan, a five-pointed star or pentagram on each berry and a vivid red colour, was believed the source of its strength. Crosses were sometimes made of rowan wood and worn for personal protection. Pieces of rowan were also attached to cattle.

Illustration: Djinni in the
Middle Eastern Middle Ages
by David Jones. Courtesy of
the David Jones Collection
of the David Jones Art
Academy. Story: 10 an 18th-century
Arabian story on the right and
Arabian story on the left.

Witchcraft is often linked to the djinn in the Middle East, with many believing sorcerers can summon djinn to do their bidding

Djinn

Djinn are so much more than wish-granting, lamp-inhabiting genies, especially as far as Arabian and Islamic mythology is concerned

Written by Poppy-Jay Palmer

Djinn and other unusual creatures dance in this ancient Middle Eastern script. The copyist and artist are unknown

When translated into English, djinn means 'hidden from sight' or 'the hidden ones', so naturally there's still a lot of mystery surrounding them.

Anglicized as 'genies' and Romanized as 'djinn', djinn are supernatural creatures (categorized as spirits and demons) that played a large part in Arabian and later Islamic mythology. A lot of Arabian people worshipped djinn like gods during the Pre-Islamic period, but unlike gods djinn were not regarded as being immortal. Though the exact origin of djinn remains unclear, a number of scholars believe that they began as malevolent spirits of deserts and unclean places who could take animal form. Others think they were originally pagan deities that fell from grace as other deities became more important. Djinn may have been worshipped but they were also feared and thought to be the cause of a variety of diseases and mental illnesses, with the mentally ill being described as 'majnun', Arabic for 'djinn-possessed'.

As far as Islamic theology is concerned, djinn has two definitions, the first being an object that human sensory organs cannot detect, including angels, demons and the

interior of human beings, and the second being an invisible entity created from smokeless fire by God, who roamed the earth before Adam.

It is believed by Muslims that Muhammad was sent as a prophet to both human and djinn communities. Likewise, ancient Israeli king Solomon was gifted by God to be able to talk to djinn and animals. The story goes that the djinn were originally sent to live in harmony with

humans, but a certain amount of injustice and corruption led to God sending angels to battle the djinn. With the revelation of Islam they were given another chance at salvation.

As the Islamic religion developed, the djinn were downgraded from deities to regular spirits. They were placed on the same level as humans and were subject to God's judgement, and able to attain futures in Paradise or Hell. When Islam began to spread

outside of Arabia into Africa, Turkey, Iran and India, beliefs about the djinn also began to develop as they reached different communities. Persians likened djinn to the Daeva from Zoroastrian lore and believed they could possess humans. Moroccans believed this too and devised rituals to exorcize them. But all depictions of djinn shared certain similarities: they lived in human-like societies, where they ate and drank, practiced religion, had families and experienced emotions.

Even in modern times, many Egyptians believe sleep paralysis is caused by djinn attacks

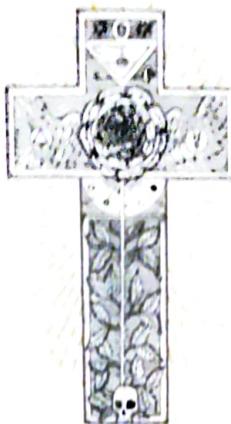
An illustration by Edmund Dulac of the djinn from 'Aladdin's Wonderful Lamp', published in 1938

"Djinn may have been worshipped, but they were also feared"

Rosicrucianism declined in popularity during the 17th century due to the European intellectual movement, the Enlightenment



This emblematic image of the Invisible College of the Rosy Cross emerged in 1618



Rosicrucianism

When ancient manifestos telling of a secret brotherhood emerged after being 'hidden' for decades, a new spiritual movement began

Written by David Crookes

Europe in the early 17th century was not a happy place. It was a continent marked by religious divisions and political strife which would escalate into the bloody Thirty Years' War that led to eight million lives being lost.

At the same time, it was a period of great change. During the century, modern philosophy and science emerged thanks to impressive thinkers such as Newton and Descartes. But were these men also members of the spiritual movement Rosicrucianism? Some have said so but, alas, we may never know.

There are a great many stories and myths about Rosicrucianism, not least those which surround its origins. What we know to be true, however, is that in 1614 in the Holy Roman Empire state of Hesse-Kassel, located in present-day Germany, the first of two anonymously published manifestos was published that would cause a huge stir – not least because they apparently shed light on a supposed secret brotherhood that no-one had heard of before.

From that point on, you can take much of the origin story with a pinch of salt. For while the first of these manifestos, the *Fama Fraternitatis of the Meritorious Order of the Rosy Cross*, was a revelation to all who read or learned about it,

it was heralded as a hoax, a joke or mere allegory, depending on the interpretation, almost from the start. But that's not to say it didn't have many followers or believers or that it wasn't even legitimate. Quite the opposite. It was viewed as another path to enlightenment and many saw it as a way forward for intellectual, social, religious and political reform.

The *Fama Fraternitatis* told of a poor German doctor and mystic philosopher called Christian Rosenkreuz who, it was claimed, had travelled across Damascus, Egypt and Morocco towards Jerusalem at the turn of the 15th century in a bid to learn the occult secrets of the universe, obtain true wisdom and discover the elixir of life.

Over the course of his journey, Rosenkreuz (or Father Brother CRC as he was referred

to in the text), was said to have studied under secret Arabian masters of the occult arts, and he is understood to have built up an enviable knowledge of physics, mathematics, magic and Kabbalah.

English philosopher, scientist, statesman and author Francis Bacon is alleged to have had connections with Rosicrucianism



Key to Rosicrucianism is the belief that followers are party to life-changing secrets that originated in ancient times

The symbol of the Rose Cross

The Rose Cross, otherwise known as the Rosy Cross, was said to have been created by Christian Rosenkreuz, the founder of Rosicrucianism. But since we know Rosenkreuz to be fictional, we can suppose it was actually the work of whoever produced the manifesto that underpinned the movement.

It takes the Christian symbol of the cross and embeds it with a rose at its center, and it clearly marries well with Christian Rosenkreuz's name. What it actually symbolizes is open to debate, although some posit that the cross represents the human body and the rose the unfolding consciousness of individuals.

The Rose Cross has also come to represent silence and salvation for some, while others see it as symbol of human reproduction being elevated to the spiritual, with the rose being female and the cross male.

Such is its power and attractiveness, it came to be used by more modern groups such as the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, an organisation which was devoted to the study and practice of the occult from 1887 to 1903. It still forms part of the emblems of the Rosicrucian Fellowship and the Ancient Mystical Order Rosae Crucis, or AMORC.



When he returned to Germany in 1407, he fled and compelled to impart what he had learned but he was claimed to have been ridiculed by the literati. Instead, he founded the Rosicrucian Order, or Order of the Rose Cross, and initially shared his knowledge with three receptive doctors. Two years later, Rosenkreuz went on to build a sanctuary called the House of the Holy Spirit where the followers - who by now numbered eight - would meet every year on the same day.

Each of those men were understood to be good doctors, determined to heal the sick for free. They agreed to wear only the dress of the country they were in, to continue the order by finding someone worthy to succeed themselves after death and, to ensure that the Fraternity would remain secret for 100 years.

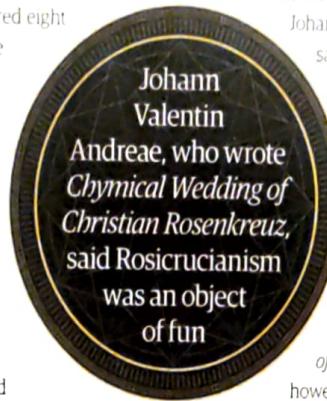
But while it was suggested that Rosenkreuz himself had scribed the words, squirreling the resulting manuscript away only for it to be discovered later, only fundamentalists really took it literally or believed the man actually existed. The rest saw *Fama Fraternitatis* as an allegorical manuscript, although some have also come to believe that the Order of the Rose Cross may have been a disguise for another secret movement.

In any case, the point of Rosicrucianism was that it shed light on an ancient world order, blending science, alchemy, arts and mysticism with an emphasis on acquired knowledge as a way for mankind to move forward. Like Kabbalah it pointed to one truth, told via the use of various symbols, parables and metaphors.

Fama Fraternitatis explored philosophy, religion and ethics and this was furthered in the second manifesto, *Confessio Fraternitatis (The Confessio)* in 1615 which not only explicitly stated it was communicating "by parables" but said Rosenkreuz's knowledge had been imparted on him by angels and spirits.

It cemented the esoteric order in the minds of many, and the fact that they were "concealed from the average man" and able to "provide insight into nature, the physical universe and the spiritual realm" helped to make them feel attractive. There was comfort in the belief that the movement heavily pre-dated contemporary times, even if it did not. Adding to the mystery was the claim that Brother Rosenkreuz was laid to rest in his own sanctuary in 1484 aged 106 - a vault said to contain many treasures and be lit by an inner sun.

The claim that this was found in a perfect state of preservation 120 years later in 1604 was



met with a spirit of general information, according to Dame Frances Yates, author of *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment*. She says the opening of the vault symbolized the opening of a door in Europe and it was to lead to a new age of understanding. This displayed parallels with Christianity.

Indeed, the Lutheran theologian Johann Valentin Andreae is said to have written the manifesto himself, although that is disputed and will perhaps never be resolved.

Andreae did write an odd alchemical romance called the *Chymical Wedding of Christian Rosenkreuz* in 1616, however, and it too proved very

influential. Again, there were references of sorts to Christianity, not least in the division of the story into Seven Days, much like Genesis. There is also a nod to the Father of Lights - a phrase that appears in the book of James in the King James Bible along with nine Lords - and it is no coincidence there are nine books in the New Testament. So while Andreae said



The grave of Christian Rosenkreuz, depicted as the Philosophers' Mountain



In work was "Iudibrium" (an object of fun); however, the parts that contained origins of Rosicrucianism were clear.

Reuben Clymer, a former Supreme Grand Master of the Fraternitas Rosae Crucis and author of *The Rosy Cross: Its Teachings* published in 1965, said the *Fama Fraternitatis* also combined many concepts and esoteric ideas, drawing upon symbolism and Paracelsian principles. Paracelsus pioneered aspects of the medical revolution of the Renaissance and Rosicrucians would study his *Prognostications*. Meanwhile, the Rosicrucian Michael Maier, who died in 1622, said: "Our origins are

Egyptian and Samothrace, the Magi of Persia, the Pythagoreans and the Arabs."

Such deep inspiration and a revelatory world view won the movement many followers, and they numbered some high profile thinkers such as the English philosopher and scientist Francis Bacon (who some argue may also have been behind the manifestos of 1614 and 1615). Anyone who took the teachings on board would feel special and part of a select elite by the fact that they were hooking into something deemed revelatory. There is

**Maier's
Silentium Post
Clamores claimed
Rosicrucianism to
be drawn from an
eternal philosophy
underlying all
religions**

an attraction in believing the Rosicrucians are operating invisibly and have the secret and power to put things right.

This concept is what is said to have led to the formation of the Invisible College which became a precursor group to the Royal Society of London. Rosicrucian principles steered people towards a utopian world populated by enlightened

people spreading good and sharing knowledge of the arts and natural science. The Invisible College followed the teaching that knowledge can be disseminated among learned men gathering in groups.

Freemasonry was said to be an outgrowth of Rosicrucianism. Indeed, the English essayist Thomas De

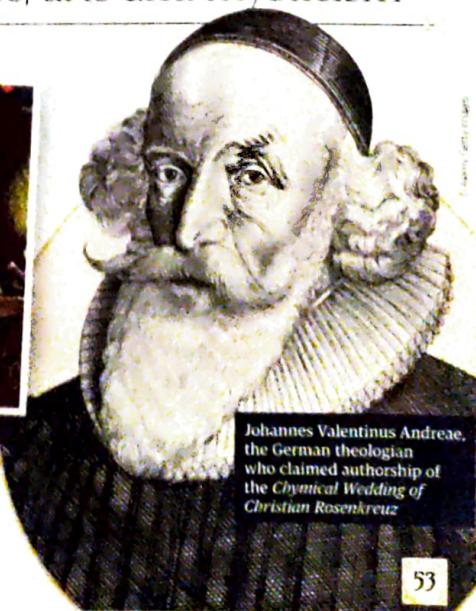
Quincey believed the movement influenced Freemasonry when it arrived in England. Prominent Rosicrucian Elias Ashmole joined the Freemasonry on 16 October 1646 and, in 1750, there was a reference to English Freemasons having copied some Rosicrucian ceremonies.

What this points to, however, is Rosicrucianism leading to secret societies rather than starting out as one. For while the story of Rosenkreuz makes claims of a brotherhood that met behind closed doors and remained hidden from society, it is more likely that Rosicrucianism formed in the early 17th century and that it did so very much out in the open, given that published work of that nature was difficult to keep under wraps.

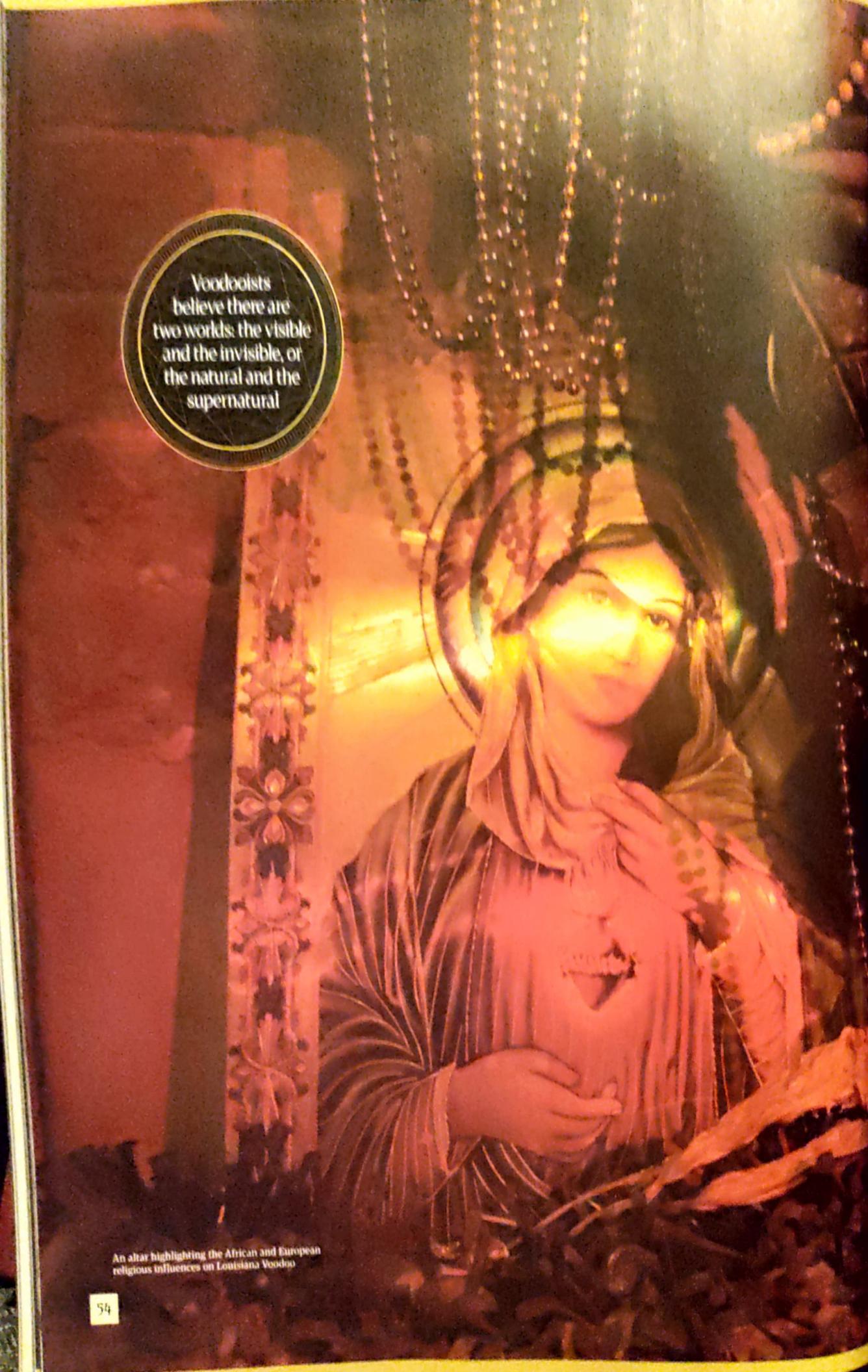
"Rosiocrucianism shed light on an ancient world order, blending science, arts and mysticism"



Algemeine und General
REFORMATIO
der ganzen Welt.
Bischof
FAMA FR
TERNITATIS,
Desß Ldlichen Ordens
Rosenkreuzes / an alle Gel
und Hnper Europa gesche
ben:
Auch einer kurzen REPO
von dem Herrn Hahnreger aufstell
diesigen von den Jheren Rosenkreuz
gegen / was auf eine Galeron ge
richtet
Ihs. offenslich in Druck verfertiget
vnd aberreichen Herren communisiet
The first page of the *Fama Fraternitatis Rosae Crucis* which first told of Father C.R. (aka Christian Rosenkreuz)
Right: A symbolic representation of Christian Rosenkreuz, who most agree was fictional



Johannes Valentinus Andreae, the German theologian who claimed authorship of the *Chemical Wedding of Christian Rosenkreuz*



Voodooists believe there are two worlds: the visible and the invisible, or the natural and the supernatural

An altar highlighting the African and European religious influences on Louisiana Voodoo

Origins of Louisiana voodoo

Louisiana voodoo is an offshoot from Haitian vodou, the older West African vodun, and is distinguished by its own set of specific innovations and rituals

Written by Martyn Conterio

New Orleans is an American city unlike any other. Famous for its cuisine, music and festivals, in the late-20th century it came to be known widely as 'the Big Easy', reflecting the locals' penchant for a good time and unruffled nature. But New Orleans' past as a center for the slave trade and its lurid associations with voodoo—many think it an evil cult—means the Crescent City (another nickname bestowed upon the place) boasts a darkness few other cities in the nation can match. Chicago and New York had their gangsters, Los Angeles its movie stars, but New Orleans boasted a secret world primed by supernatural energy, a land of voodoo kings and queens, people to be respected and sometimes

feared. A tormenting hex can be worse than a belly full of lead.

Almost everything we know about voodoo usually comes from films, and Hollywood has been very selective about which aspects of the religion to focus on, misrepresenting rites and rituals as something heathen and blasphemous, sometimes involving human sacrifice, satanic, black magic and—in the Haitian version—zombies, those brought back from the grave and forced to work on the plantations and do their master's bidding, their souls trapped, their bodies controlled by a wicked bokor. Voodoo as represented in the movies is tantamount to devil-worshipping. The secretive bayou setting, the rhythmic pounding of drums, the crackle

of torchlight, shadowed bodies swaying in blasphemous displays of demonic possession, led fevered imaginations to interpret these things as sacrilegious rites. In Christian minds, voodoo is satanic and closely associated with witchcraft, necromancy and other black arts. HP Lovecraft wrote in *The Call of Cthulhu* (1928), that the sinister cult at the center of his tale was "more diabolic than even the blackest of the African voodoo circles." Very often, voodoo's political and spiritual roots are ignored in favour of racist prejudice and plain ignorance.

As with Haitian vodou, Louisiana voodoo's roots lie in the grotesque slave trade and the African diaspora. Forcibly exiled from their homelands and treated as subhuman, they were

Baron Samedi

Baron Samedi is one of, if not the most, well-known voodoo spirits, partly thanks to a character named Baron Samedi in the James Bond adventure, *Live and Let Die* (1973). The term describes both the dead and the vital role he plays in the voodoo religion, created during the 17th century. Francois D'Orléans, aka Pope Koo, isolated characteristics of the voodoo gods, such as spreading in a hand cloth and always wearing black and sporting sunglasses, to keep his subjects frightened and in the spooky belief he was Baron Samedi incarnate.

Baron guards over the underworld and the souls of the dead. He grants the dead and takes them to heaven. There is no hell in voodoo, only a kind of waiting room (Vudun), which souls must pass through, before being reunited with their ancestors. Samedi, named after the French word for Saturday, is known for his love of voodoo, being a bit of a trickster and a living for negro and white奴. With no top hat, cane and diamond face, he cuts an imposing figure, though he is not benevolent.

Samedi is associated with St Expedite, a saint of many origins, who has an association with the dead, though Baron Samedi and St Expedite are not syncretized in Haitian voodoo.

Baron Samedi
Figure on sale in a shop in New Orleans

"Voodoo dates
further back in
time than the
story of Jesus
Christ to
6,000
years."



Baron is dead, dismembered and reassembled with his head in the mouth, a terrible sight bewitched by ghouls, voodoo priests and magicians. He apparently, according to the ghosts of the Caribbean, Ghouls and voodoo practitioners, injury to Baron is a death sentence, especially if the voodoo priest manages to keep the body together, which is not easy.

Baron is known as:

Baron Samedi, Baron Samedi

Iwa are
contacted and
consulted for advice
by practitioners and
worshippers who are
seeking guidance
in their lives

Baron Samedi's tools were forbidden and
anyone who owned one was forced to give it up.

Whipping was another way to
punish voodoo religion and
their own black and white system.
If caught in worship, they were
whipped. If they prayed during
the whipping, owners were
even more inclined, fearing
an curse and sometimes killed
them outright (or threatened to). In South Carolina a 1735
uprising by Congolese slaves
led to reprisals by lawmakers.

Although voodoo played no significant
role in the rebellion, the Negro Act of 1749
banned drums, horn and other loud instruments,
the kinds of equipment used in ceremonies. Slaves
were also forbidden to learn to write or congregate
in groups.

Voodoo dates further back in time than the
2,000-year-old story of Jesus Christ to 6,000
years, with its origins in vodun, a complex religion
of West African countries such as Benin, where
vodun is the state religion. Vodun has its roots in
the word vodu, translated in the Fon language
as spirit. With regional variations, the Fon, Ewe
and the people of West Africa believe in Nana
Djula, the divine creator, with her two sons
Dede and Mawu, represent the sun and moon.



A French newspaper sensationalising
Louisiana Voodoo, with an image of
human sacrifice in a bayou

Congo Square and voodoo

Early 19th-century New Orleans had a municipal code for slaves. It was instigated long before in the 18th century by the French, and was continued during the city's Spanish period, and after the Louisiana Purchase, and known as the Code Noir. Compared to other parts of the US, Louisiana Creoles were but as strict in enforcing assimilation on slaves, allowing their culture to take root in the city's fabric. One part of this Code Noir allowed slaves Sundays off and by 1817, a patch of land to congregate in, which today lies in the French neighbourhood. This designated area became known as Congo Square.

Every Sunday, slaves and gens de couleur libre would hang out, sell snacks such as deep-fried cakes coated in sugar, dance and play drums. The weekly gatherings became an attraction for white citizens and tourists, too, who would look on at the vivid spectacle and marvelled. Although the slaves and others were heavily restricted and monitored, the place thrived and its association with voodoo legend has it, came about because after the sun sank low, voodooists would gather by grand dame Marie Laveau—to commence and partake in rituals.

While Catholic teachings of God, Nana Buluku is open to all beings, leaving human trials and tribulations to be overseen by voodoo spirits, and there are numerous assortments to worship. Vodun and its Caribbean and American offering do not recognise a distinction between what we might call the sacred and the profane, between the natural and supernatural, or select groups (clergy). Anybody can communicate with the spirits, after undergoing the required learning.

At a glance, vodun looks to be diametrically opposed to forming any kinship with Roman Catholicism. The cosmology of vodun—with its myriad spirits (known as loas or lwas) seems totally at odds with Catholic teachings about heaven and hell, salvation or damnation. Vodun, Haitian vodou and, by extension, Louisiana voodoo is far more interested in a cyclical relationship between life and death, with a focus on metempsychosis (the transmigration of the soul). In Catholic tradition, possession by spirits

Iwa are connected or associated with a natural power source, such as water deity, Yemaya

known as the Iwa of water. These are the spirits of the land. The Iwa who divides access between spirits and worshippers is Papa La-Dieu. Syncopated with the name.

From the horrors of slavery sprung an attempt to retain a culture and heritage. The coast of western and central Africa was prime hunting ground for slave traders.

Once clapped in irons and shipped thousands of miles across the Atlantic, attempts were made by slaves to dehumanize people, by robbing them of individuality and freedom. Slave owners thought allowing workers to keep hold of their traditions and culture would possibly lead to rebellion and uprising. The development of vodun into Haitian vodou allowed slaves to take part in their heritage and culture.



To this day, Congo Square remains a focal point for African-American culture and celebration

while creating a new form of worship based on exposure to Catholicism. Here then, religious belief was also an act of political defiance.

As vodun is monotheistic, the new syncretic vision was indeed compatible (despite a legion of differences) with Roman Catholicism's belief in one God. Loas and their function as figures to offer prayers to were akin to the Catholic saints, so the switch wasn't too difficult. With no scriptures or artifacts, vodun was developed clandestinely and served as psychological relief and a prime source of spiritual strength to slaves. Vodun, Haitian vodou and Louisiana voodoo are essentially about healing and experiences of transcendence. The emphasis is on rituals, incorporating song and dance into proceedings. The body is a medium and vessel for communing with lwas and the dead.

Vodun spread and entered different territories, other Caribbean islands, the coast of South America and mainland USA. The variations in rituals and beliefs allowed for distinct regional offshoots to come into fruition. In Haiti, creators such as Nzambi or Nana Buluku became Bondye (based on the French *Bon Dieu*, meaning good god) and the loas became known as lwas, the spirits becoming a mythology involving warring nations and

families. These lwas have connections to Roman Catholic saints, such as snake deity Li Grand Zombi's association with Saint Patrick. The latter figure - Li Grand Zombi - would have a major role, when Haitian vodou spread to New Orleans and Louisiana, transforming into voodoo. One piece of paraphernalia, above all others, was seized upon as an abomination with exclusively malevolent intentions: the voodoo doll.

There is a historical basis for the voodoo doll's bad reputation, though one subsequently aggrandised. Associated with curses, manipulation and bad vibes, this totem springs from the Fon people of Benin and has been linked to Kongo's nkisi (plural: minkisi), which means 'things which do things'. Minkisi are containers housing spirits of the dead and can be used by the living for a host of reasons (including harming people). In Haitian vodou, these figurines are known as pwen. Voodoo dolls became a prominent - if misunderstood - icon in Louisiana voodoo in large part due to the most famous voodoo queen of all, Marie Laveau, a devout Catholic and voodoo practitioner who helped the religion take some interesting turns.

As voodoo made landfall in North America, Native American influences, European black magic

Voodoo dolls and their function in the religion have been greatly abused by Hollywood movies



A window display in the famous French Quarter in New Orleans, showing the crass commercialisation of voodoo

and Louisiana folklore left their mark on the religion, bringing what is known as hoodoo into existence. Hoodoo, also known as rootwork, is the practice of making potions and charms from mixtures of roots, bodily fluids and herbs. Botanical knowledge essentially trumps any specific religious tenet, although hoodoo considers the Bible to be the best available grimoire (a book of spells) for its followers.

and the practice is founded in the slave trade and slaves' exposure to Christianity. Hoodoo doctors created their own belief system from all sorts of potions—foot track magic, said to harness the power of a person's footprint, by using dirt from the track bottled up and burned, or 'hot foot powder', sprinkled on a target's doorstep and said to bring them bad luck.

Hoodoo was primarily practiced by Afro-Americans, and is connected to and based on the older vodun. Marie Laveau became a powerful and influential figure in New Orleans, developing and promoting the traditions into the wider community, including the white elites of society. She is responsible for the boom in the voodoo doll, the religion's move into superstition, the use of *gnis gris* (a West African Wolof word for a talisman which brings the wearer luck and protects them from harm), worship of Li Grand Zombi (not to be confused with zombies, it's a snake god, the serpent represents the spiritual balance between genders, between sacred knowledge and worship). The origin of the name has been attributed to Marie Laveau's python-Zombi—but there are arguments it springs from the Bantu word 'Nzambi'—the serpent deity. Either way, boa constrictors became part of the theatre of Louisiana voodoo.

Voodoo does not have a chief spiritual leader, main holy site, any sacred texts nor religious artifacts

Unlike in Benin and other parts of Africa where slave traders plundered the populous, once vodun reached the Caribbean and America, women became involved in rituals. In Haiti, they are known as *Hougans* (men) and *Mambos* (women). In Louisiana voodoo, this transformed into the kings and queens of voodoo, who became not just priests and priestess of their religion, but people to whom congregations looked for spells and potions, as well as respected community leaders. Doctor John (also known as Bayou John) was another famous 19th century voodooist said to have mentored Laveau. Both these historical figures were renowned in their time and lived during New Orleans voodoo's heyday—between 1820-1860.

John was a tattooed former slave and sailor from Senegal, whose powers involved resurrection and healing. It is said he could heal those on the verge of death. Born in 1937, Fred Staten moved from Haiti to New Orleans and styled himself Papa Midnite, crafting a stage routine which featured him biting the heads off live chickens during rituals, earning the sobriquet 'Chicken Man'. The commercialisation of Haitian vodou and Louisiana

voodoo ended up a racket preying upon gullible folk and in New Orleans has become primarily a must-experience thing for tourists. Sales in *mojos*, *gnis gris* and charm bags known as *ouanga* became a means of easy money at extortionate sums. It's a long time since the controversial Marie Laveau commanded huge audiences in Congo Square or the shoreline of Lake Pontchartrain, said to be in their thousands.

How many identify their religion as New Orleans/Louisiana voodoo today is in the thousands at most, maybe two or three per cent of citizens, and mostly centered around the 7th ward. Away from the tourist traps and sensationalist movies, there remain those who take voodoo seriously and respectfully. The founding of the Voodoo Spiritual Temple in 1990 served to carry on the traditions handed down, showcasing the great spirituality at the heart of vodou and reclaimed it from decades of misinformation, propaganda and lies.

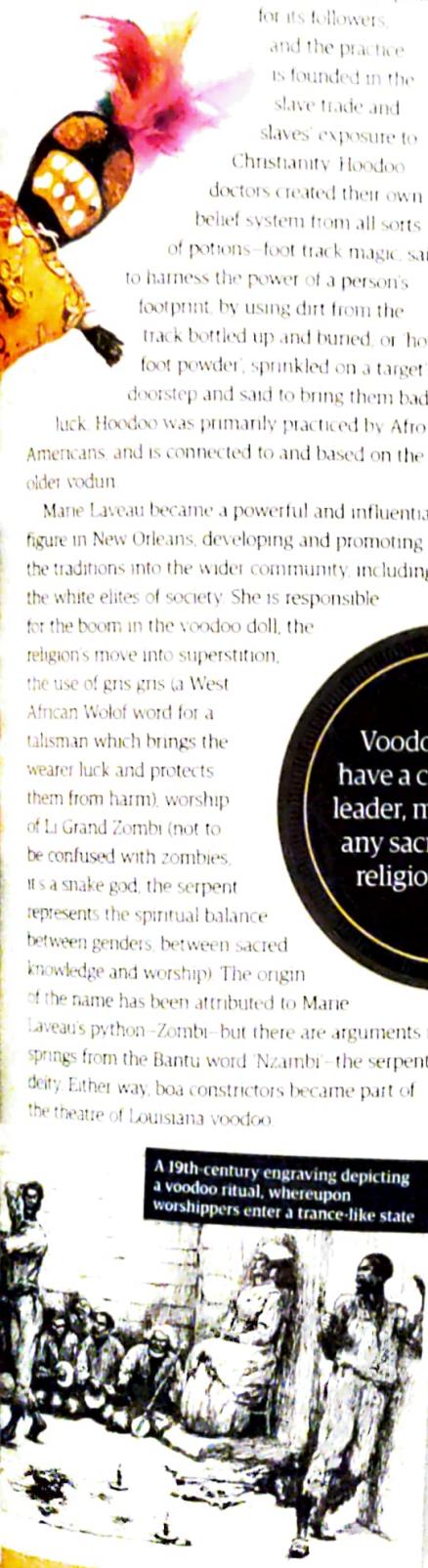
"Marie Laveau became a powerful and influential figure in New Orleans"

Voodoo's musical influence

References to Louisiana voodoo and hoodoo appeared early on in blues tunes by Robert Johnson, a guitarist and singer said to have sold his soul at a crossroads. Yet it might be surprising to discover voodoo has influenced not just jazz and the blues, but everything from rock 'n' roll to heavy metal. Audiences screamed with delight and some were outraged, when Elvis Presley swayed his hips with abandon, or the times Jerry Lee Lewis smashed the keys of piano like he was possessed. In a way, they were very much possessed, by the rhythm of the beat and the energy conjured by music, giving in to the primal urge to let go and lose oneself to dance. Music theorists and anthropologists have noted vodou's debt to 20th century pop, and the origin of the word 'rock'—as in rock music—itself is derived from the West African 'rak'.

Blues musicians such as Muddy Waters were influenced southern church groups, and this fed into the era of white boys taking the blues and transforming it into rock, with famed guitarists Eric Clapton, Keith Richards and others constantly name-checking the Deep South as its inspiration. Screamin' Jay Hawkins went one step further, by incorporating voodoo imagery into his act, and wrote a hoodoo-themed classic, *I Put a Spell on You*. We've vodou to thank for rock stars going wild on stage and embracing the beat with a fervour with echoes of religiosity to it. The rock star is much like the voodoo king or queen leading the congregation.

Screamin' Jay Hawkins incorporated voodoo imagery into his live act





Marie Laveau

The voodoo queen

New Orleans' most famous daughter reigned over the city for decades, with both rich and poor seeking her mystic counsel

Written by Martyn Conterio

Marie Laveau wasn't just born in New Orleans, during the syncretic religion's heyday between the 1820s and 1860s she was New Orleans. No other citizen in the port city's 300 year existence has so represented the unique and mysterious vibe of the town nor gripped the public's imagination.

Although her biography is littered with contradictions and codswallop due to a lack of verifiable information, this has only served to keep the flame of Marie Laveau burning in the Big Easy. So much of her life story is wrapped up in legend, fabrication and the unknowable that even her birth year is disputed. Generally given as either 1794 or 1801, the *New York Times'* 1881 obituary marked

her age at death as 98, meaning she must have been born way, way back in 1783 (10 September is recognized as Laveau's birthday.)

The doyenne of voodoo is an important icon of the Crescent City. Her family tomb is visited by throngs of people led by tour guides, tributes are left at her gravesite and the reputed location of her ramshackle cottage at Rue St Ann, in the French Quarter, a humble abode built by early settlers from wood, is commemorated with a plaque. How Marie Laveau rose to prominence is a fascinating, albeit murky confluence of religion, race, class, society and power.

Born to a white man named Charles Laveau (a Creole plantation owner) and his mixed-race mistress, Marguerite Darcantel, said to be

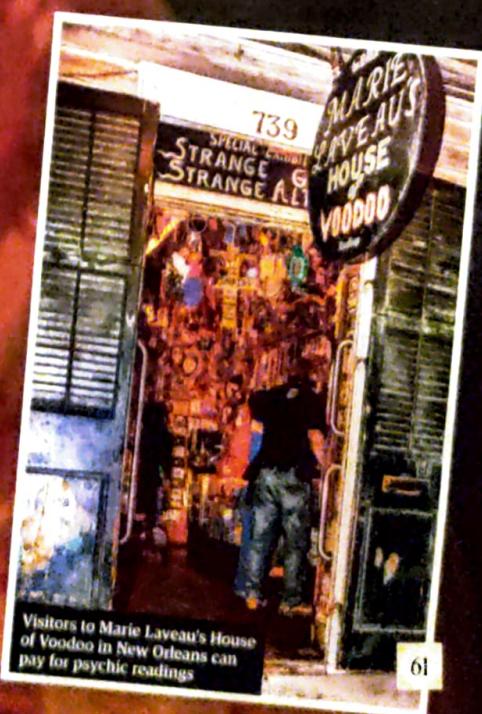
A 1929 painting of Marie Laveau, historically based on an 1819 portrait.

DEFINING MOMENT

First association with voodoo

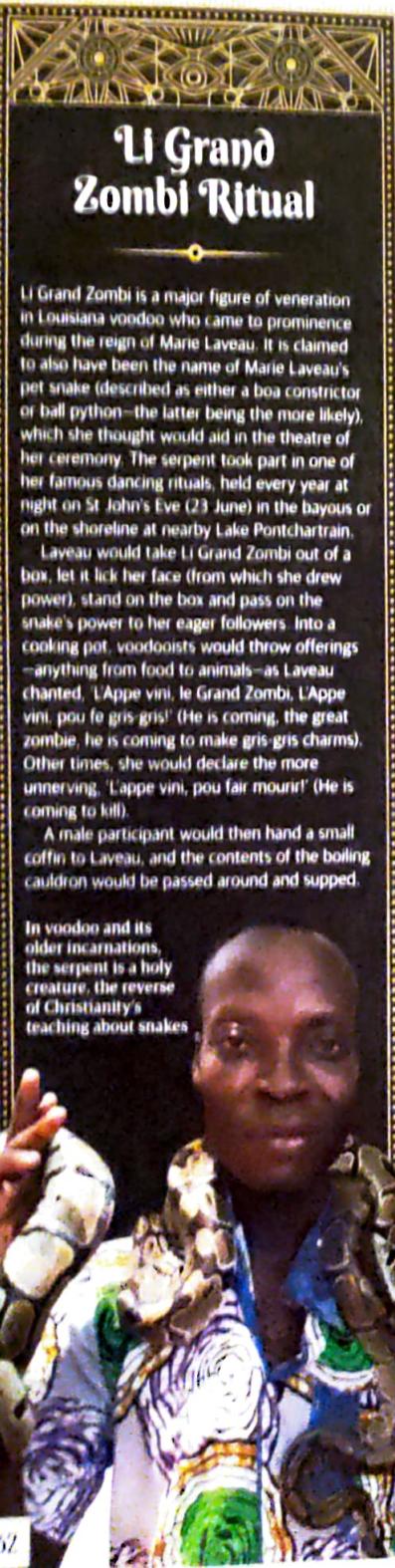
The first recorded instance of Marie Laveau and voodoo comes from a newspaper report about a complaint made to the courts regarding a raid on a voodoo ceremony and the taking by the police of a ceremonial statue. The report does highlight a connection between Laveau, voodoo and her position in New Orleans as a community leader and highly respected voodoo expert.

c1850



Visitors to Marie Laveau's House of Voodoo in New Orleans can pay for psychic readings.

"In this decade she may have developed intimate knowledge of voodoo and rootwork (also known as conjure)"



Li Grand Zombi Ritual

Li Grand Zombi is a major figure of veneration in Louisiana voodoo who came to prominence during the reign of Marie Laveau. It is claimed to also have been the name of Marie Laveau's pet snake (described as either a boa constrictor or ball python—the latter being the more likely), which she thought would aid in the theatre of her ceremony. The serpent took part in one of her famous dancing rituals, held every year at night on St John's Eve (23 June) in the bayous or on the shoreline at nearby Lake Pontchartrain. Laveau would take Li Grand Zombi out of a box, let it lick her face (from which she drew power), stand on the box and pass on the snake's power to her eager followers. Into a cooking pot, voodooists would throw offerings—anything from food to animals—as Laveau chanted, 'L'appe vini, le Grand Zombi, l'appe vini, pou fe gris-gris!' (He is coming, the great zombie, he is coming to make gris-gris charms). Other times, she would declare the more unnerving, 'L'appe vini, pou fair mourir!' (He is coming to kill).

A male participant would then hand a small coffin to Laveau, and the contents of the boiling cauldron would be passed around and supped.

In voodoo and its older incarnations, the serpent is a holy creature, the reverse of Christianity's teaching about snakes.

Choctaw Native American and African, Marie grew up uneducated but free from the perils and horrors of slavery. The famous 1835 portrait of the voodoo queen as a middle-aged adult shows her as light-skinned and wearing an African tignon (head covering). Yet there are arguments over the accuracy of the painting. Described as beautiful and alluring, some people who knew her in life said she could pass for white, while others claimed she was dark-skinned. It almost goes without saying that it cannot have been both.

In 1823, she married a fellow *gens de couleur libre* (free person of color) named Jacques Paris, who came to America via the influx of Saint-Domingue (Haitian) free men, slaves and traders fleeing the uprising and battles against colonial France. Paris and Laveau were wed at St Louis Cathedral by Pere Antoine (a Spanish Capuchin friar named Antonio de Sedeila who became an equally revered figure in the city and close friend to Laveau). Settling in the French Quarter a year into the marriage, Paris vanished one day without a trace, leaving his new wife perplexed as to his whereabouts. She insisted that he had died and not walked out on her. Paris never was located.

Her next union was more rewarding and successful. With Paris out of the picture, a year later, in 1824, she was domiciled in common law marriage with Captain Christophe Dominique Glapion, with whom she would stay until his death in 1855. During

their marriage Laveau gave birth to 15 children, though sadly nearly all of them died from yellow fever or other outbreaks that plagued New Orleans due to the city's poor standard of sanitation and terrible living conditions. It is also in this period—the 1820s—that Laveau is believed to have started her ascent to the top.



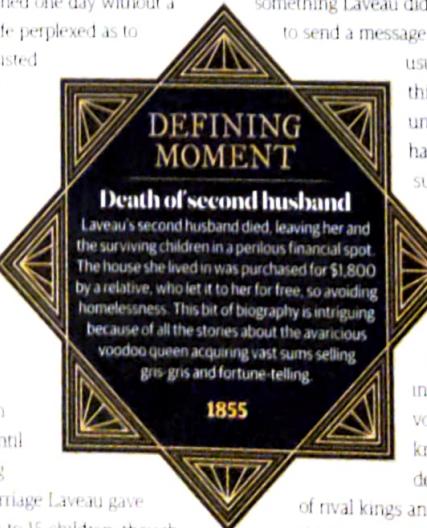
An 1886 engraving of the elderly voodoo queen Marie Laveau

In various narratives, it is claimed she was tutored by such noted figures associated with the city's underground religion as Dr John, the medicine man and ex-slave, and Marie Salopek, who later became somebody to cast aside.

something Laveau did quite viciously in order to send a message to others thinking about usurping her. How accurate this account is remains unknown, though detractors have picked up on Dr John's success in selling trinkets to white folk as being the impetus for Laveau to try her hand at it too.

In this decade she may have developed intimate knowledge of voodoo and rootwork (also known as conjure) and, despite her harsh treatment of rival kings and queens, Laveau cultivated a public persona for kind-heartedness and virtuous acts. For the next 30 or more years Laveau popularized voodoo among New Orleans citizens, both rich and poor, all the while remaining a devout Catholic. Was she, then, a legitimate religious figure or a scam artist looking to bleed gullible types of a buck or two?

Laveau's occupation as a hairdresser put her in a unique position. From local gossip to insider info on the echelons of New Orleans elites (gleaned via their pliable servants), the voodoo queen was



DEFINING MOMENT

Death of second husband

Laveau's second husband died, leaving her and the surviving children in a perilous financial spot. The house she lived in was purchased for \$1,800 by a relative, who let it to her for free, so avoiding homelessness. This bit of biography is intriguing because of all the stories about the avaricious voodoo queen acquiring vast sums selling gris-gris and fortune-telling.

1855

able to learn everybody's business and use it to her advantage. As a pillar of the community and icon in the superstitious, she became the go-to person for advice, spells and potions.

In terms of the development in Louisiana voodoo, Laveau promoted Catholic icons, incense and prayers alongside African-based totems such as the use of gris-gris (charms) and voodoo dolls. She sold mojo and other trinkets supposedly imbued with voodoo powers.

The *New York Times* obituaries described the cottage on Rue St Ann as quaint, with a broken fence and trees drooping over the property, as if at any moment branches would pierce the abode and send it crumbling, the author painting a picture of humbleness bordering on desolation. Laveau, though, received her guests with pomp, cooking for them and making sure their ills and worries were listened to with a sympathetic ear or banished with magic, which seems a world away from lund newspaper stories of naked dancing, serpent worship and satanic hexes. What ultimately emerges from Laveau's success as both agony aunt and voodoo queen was her personal charm and skills in dealing with people from all walks of life.

New Orleans writer Robert Tallant visits the tomb of Laveau



American Horror Story costume worn by Angela Bassett as Marie Laveau

Another facet of Laveau's popularity, which was by no means all encompassing as many feared as much as liked her, according to legend, were her excursions to nurse people during outbreaks of cholera and yellow fever (diseases which killed her own kids). This voodoo Florence Nightingale act even extended to visiting condemned men in prison. Yet she commanded respect too.

Children were kept in line by mention of her name, as if she was the bogeyman, and it was known around New Orleans that Laveau

knew everybody's dirty little secrets and where bodies were figuratively buried, gathering the information seemingly by a mixture of bullying servants with voodoo threats or plain old bribery. How she made gains from this knowledge is unknown, as she lived her life in the hotel on Rue St Ann and was hardly living it up in one of the city's grand Spanish mansions.

The first recorded instance of Laveau's connection with voodoo occurred in 1850, when she and a fellow 'gens de couleur libre' named Rosine Dominique went to court to ask for the return of a statue confiscated during a ritual, one that had been raided by the law because there were concerns of freed people mixing with slaves away from Congo Square (the designated spot in the city where they were allowed to mingle on Sundays). The report is intriguing because it looks as if Laveau was serving as a go-between in the community. A fine was paid and the statue returned, though not to Laveau.

In 1859, she made the papers again in the city when a complaint was made describing her as a hag who was disturbing the peace with her voodoo rituals. As singing, dancing

and drumming were involved, there would certainly have been a lot of noise.

Holy figure or charlatan, who used blackmail more than black magic to get her way? Laveau was and always will be a controversial figure. Folk to this day leave offerings of beads, booze and flowers at the tomb of Laveau in St Louis cemetery #1. In the second cemetery, St Louis #2, there is a crypt known as the Voodoo Vault, which is also believed to be her resting, though quite how the rumour started is unknown, as the resting place is most definitely to be the one in cemetery #1, marked Famille Vve. Paris/nee Laveau. Xs are made with red brick, left as part of a devotional message and request for Laveau to make their wishes come true. However, voodooists consider the act disrespectful and damaging to the crypt's structure. Even so, these small acts of devotion are a powerful testament to Laveau's legacy in the Big Easy.



Tarot

From the Chariot and the Hanged Man to Death, the Tower and the Devil, can you really play your cards right with the tarot?

Written by Poppy-Jay Palmer

The origins of tarot cards were quite innocent; they first became popular as playing cards in the 15th century, designed to play games like Italian tarocchini and French tarot. It wasn't until the late 16th century that they earned their current reputation: their link to the occult when they started being used for the art of divination, specifically in the newly popular forms of tarotology and cartomancy.

Through interpreting the illustrations on tarot cards, many people believe that tarot diviners, commonly known as readers, can gain insight into the past, present and future. There are several theories behind the workings of using the cards to tell fortunes. Some believe the results to the questions posed by the reader are guided by a spiritual force. Others believe the cards have the power to tap into the human collective unconscious, or the subject's own creative unconscious.

Those interested in occult activities saw the tarot as something exciting and revolutionary. Those that feared it saw it as an instrument for the Devil. Tarot divination became popular among occultists when the French started to develop the idea that the cards carried mystical properties. In 1781, Antoine Court de Gebelin published a dissertation on the idea that the tarot design was based on ancient Egyptian religious texts, featuring the likes of Isis, Osiris and Typhon, and therefore carried deep divine significance. Since Court de Gebelin's dissertation, historians have discovered that

none of his ideas regarding the links between ancient Egypt and the tarot were true.

French occultist Etteilla, the pseudonym of Jean-Baptiste Alhiette, became the first to assign divinatory meaning to the cards with the Tarot of Marseilles deck (different kinds of decks were available in different regions), which contained themes relating to ancient Egypt. In 1783, he devised a proper method of tarot divination, created the first Egyptian tarot to be used exclusively for tarot cartomancy, and formed the first occultist tarot society for enthusiasts.

Taking inspiration from Etteilla's work, Marie Anne Lenormand became the first bona fide tarot reader for people in high places, including Empress Josephine and Napoleon, and quickly shot to fame within the community. As tarot cards became more popular and spread from France to other countries and cultures, the system was being updated constantly. Disputes regarding certain cards' meanings are even continuing to this day. Nowadays, there are possibly fewer readers around than when tarot cards first took off, but you still don't have to look far to find one.

Tarot cards first arrived in Europe in the bags of Islamic soldiers as they invaded Italy, Sicily and Spain in the 16th century



"Many people believe that tarot diviners, commonly known as 'readers', can gain insight into the past, present and future"

Many French occultists believed that tarot cards originated from ancient Egyptian theology

The tarot equivalent to a joker card is known as the Fool and marks the beginning of a deck



Interpretations of the meaning of individual tarot cards are still disputed to this day





During WWI, Welsh occultist Arthur Machen spawned the legend that phantom Agincourt bowmen fought at the Battle of Mons

Symbolist Belgian painter Khnopff
commissioned by Péladan, grandmaster
of Ordre de la Rose + Croix



Alphonse Mucha incorporates
the 12 Zodiac signs around
the subject's head



A panel from Alphonse Mucha's illustrated *Le Pater* (Our Father), first published in 1899. Mucha reimagined the Lord's Prayer along occult lines, reinventing it as the individual's search for a divine state

The occult revival

As the lights dimmed on the 19th century, faith and progress broke like waves on the anxious, restless mood of the age. The dead reached out to the living, miracle cures were sought, and gurus gathered followers into secret societies

Written by James Hoare

In the summer of 1894, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle found himself in a thatched cottage on the Dorset coast. An old smuggler's haunt would have made the perfect seaside getaway for the great Victorian scribe, but here on business.

Accompanied by the creator of Sherlock Holmes, Doyle and his two colleagues Frank Podmore and Charles Smith, were here to solve a mystery. They were looking for a ghost.

Like a ghost. Most haunted, the two set off with a camera and magnesium powder, hoping to take a photograph that would expose a spirit where the naked eye could not, but on spectral presence saw fit to glide in front of the lens.

The following night, the family's 20-year-old son came to visit the investigators. When they refused and began to leave, he pushed back in and begged them to stay. Suddenly, there was a crashing and banging in the silence as if some chauvinist force were flinging open the cupboard in a rage.

The diagnosis, the son did it, with help. But over Doyle's lifetime his telling of the story changed dramatically as he became more enthused with spiritualism. He believed the dead walk among us and he summoned them, and he disowned the official report composed by his more rigorous colleagues at the Society of Psychical Research.

To the 21st century perspective it is contradictory and faintly absurd that the creator of literature's most famous rationalist could be so infamously irrational, but Doyle is a perfect example of the spirit of the age. Born a Roman Catholic and educated by Jesuits, Doyle became agnostic and then ended his life a Spiritualist. He was passionate about vaccination and briefly studied to be an ophthalmologist, but then took all manner of supernatural chicanery as a matter of faith.

The late 19th century was a period of great intellectual restlessness. The French called it *fin de siècle*, which means simply end of the century, but captures something that English does not: a sense of pessimism and defeat, uncertainty and frustration, decadence and immorality.

The late 18th century and much of the 19th had been defined by the relentless march of scientific progress, and society had been shaped around

its populations had decamped from the villages to the cities that were bringing new dangers and destroying old ways of life: the centuries-old supremacy of traditional religion had been wounded by Charles Darwin, and political thought was dominated by the alarming new creeds of socialism and nationalism.

The social challenges posed by this collision of progress and faith were dealt with in various ways, sometimes by the rejection of one for the other

but also by the creative reconciliation of the two. In fact, the idea that the 18th-century Enlightenment gave way to inevitable secularisation is actually misleading. The truth is that the late 19th century saw belief reborn in surprising new guises.

In France, liberal Catholicism pushed for social reform; while in Britain and the United States, muscular Christian activism took to the streets to change the world one tea urn at a time. In the art world, the French Symbolists drew heavily on the gothic imagery of Edgar Allan Poe to reflect imagination and reject realism, while in Germany the bombastic opera of Richard Wagner wove a new Germanic mythology with nationalist undertones and disastrous consequences for the looming 20th century. Secret societies thrived in this space where old identities—whether regional or religious—seemed uncertain.

Many were political, but others took on an occult flavor. The best known of the non-magical bunch were the Freemasons—really just an old boy's network using elaborate rituals as a social bond—who were active across much of Europe and North America, and among Britain's intellectual elite, the Society for Psychical Research stroked their chins and applied (as far as they were concerned) rigorous scientific study to debate the veracity of poltergeists and possessions.

Some secret societies were contemporary reimaginings of older branches of Christian mysticism—the Martinists, Templars and Rosicrucians, and their myriad variants, schisms and spin-offs—but hot on their heels came new sects that cribbed notes from their holier-than-

The Symbolist movement was an influence on Carl Jung and Sigmund Freud, who used imagery to unlock the unconscious



Spooks and charlatans

From the very beginnings of Spiritualism, some of its practitioners were being outed as frauds who took advantage of the bereaved.

The movement began in rural New York with Margaret and Kate Fox, two sisters who in 1848 convinced their older sister their home was haunted by rapping the floor with an apple on a piece of string. They soon took what was effectively their circus act on the road with the help of some trusting Quakers who formed the core of the new Spiritualist movement.

Though the Fox sisters were outed and confessed in 1888, their dubious craft continued through countless others who used hidden accomplices, fake arms, or string to move objects, and double exposure to create haunting 'spirit photographs' that exposed spectral visitors where none had been previously visible.

The fraudulent Spiritualists had their opponents though and faced condemnation from some religious authorities, were subject to vigorous testing by the Society of Psychical Research, and were dogged by the illusionist Harry Houdini, who recognized a perversion of his own craft at work.

Though he was an old friend of Arthur Conan Doyle, Houdini and Doyle began to trade blows in the press as Houdini campaigned to expose Spiritualists by touring a stage show in which he replicated their tricks.

thou predecessors and created something dynamic and new that would redefine occultism outside of Scripture's shadow.

Most notable of these was the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, and, under Britain's infamous Aleister Crowley, the previously benign Ordo Templi Orientis (OTO). OTO had its origins as a German response to Freemasonry but morphed into the vessel for Crowley's new faith, Thelema, in the first decade of the 20th century.

Another world unto itself was the Theosophical Society, founded in the US by a Russian emigre Spiritualist called Helena Blavatsky. From her beginnings as a fraudulent table-tapper, Madame Blavatsky had become increasingly enthused by Hindu and Buddhist thought, and from the 1880s the Theosophical Society—which relocated its HQ to India—became focused on attaining higher states of consciousness by following the esoteric learning of the Masters of the Ancient Wisdom, who had been rather helpfully reincarnated into the club's upper echelons.

The abrasive German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche explained it best, writing in 1872's *The Birth of Tragedy*:

What does our great historic hunger signify; our clutching about us for countless other cultures, our consuming desire for knowledge if not the loss of myth, the mythic home, the mythic womb?

In the German-speaking world the search for a "mythic womb" was especially potent and the *Volksch* (folkish) movement emerged in the early 19th century and morphed—thanks to the influence of Theosophy—into Armanism or Ariosophy in the 1890s. Austrian antiquarians Guido von List and Jorg Lanz von Liebenfels believed there was a spiritual link between the Germanic people and their land, and the ancient Germans were a nobler and purer bunch before the arrival of "foreign" influences like Christianity, industrialisation, and democracy, as well as "foreign" races like Slavs and Jews.

This unique combination of elements, albeit with an Irish-republican rather than virulently racist character, would emerge outside of Germany in the Celtic revival poetry of WB Yeats, a rare romantic nationalist in London's occult ecosystem of glorified gentlemen's supper clubs, as well as his fellow Irishmen, the artist and poet George William "AE"

After demonstrating her powers in India, Helena Blavatsky was exposed as a fraud in 1885 by the Society for Psychical Research

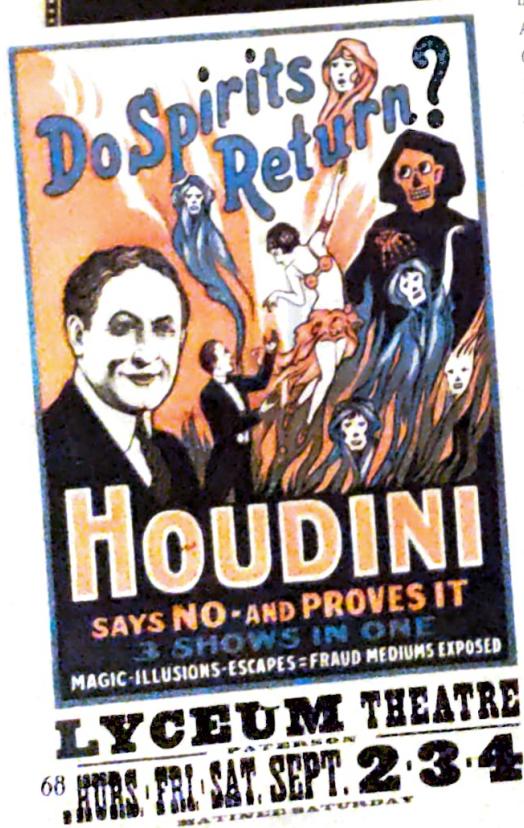
Light radiates from the forehead of Alphonse Mucha's *Morning Star*

Russell, and the fantasy novelist Lord Dunsany

"I often think I would put this belief in magic from me if I could," wrote Yeats in his 1903 pamphlet, *Ideas of Good and Evil*, "for I have come to see or to

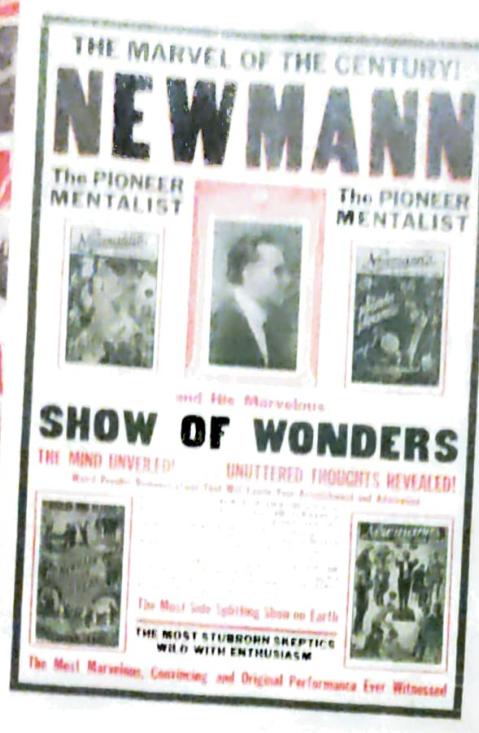
imagine, in men and women, in houses, in handicrafts, in nearly all sights and sounds, a certain evil, a certain ugliness, that comes from the slow perishing through the centuries of a quality of mind that made this belief and its evidences common over the world."

In contrast to this nationalist primitivism, French occultism was largely a metropolitan affair not much bothered by a retreat into wilderness or





His most famous act was a séance of hypnosis in the United States.



a narrow-eyed suspicion of the modern world. It was defined broadly by prayer and absinthe, for those not quite ready to cut their strings to Mother Church and the decadent dandies about town.

Symbolism was an art movement inspired by the writer Charles Baudelaire. He translated Edgar Allan Poe into French and sought to find through his work the *au-delà*—the world beyond our own—with the routes available to this lusty band being dreams, substance abuse, sex and the occult.

Among their number were artists Fernand Khnopff, Jan Toorop and Jean Delville, and writers André Gide, Stéphane Mallarmé, and Joris-Karl Huysmans, a Benedictine lay brother turned mystical novelist. Over

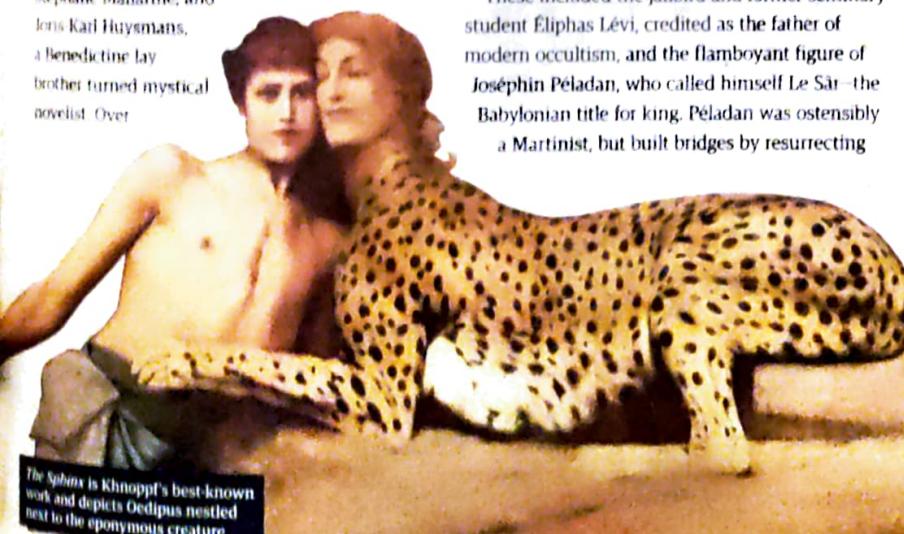
the fence in Art Nouveau, the Paris resident Czech artist Alphonse Mucha dabbled in theosophy and occultism, and conjured mythic, folkloric figures in his stylized, dreamlike work.

Catholic apostasy provided France with its most dramatic characters, often rooted in Martinism (a belief that man could return to the spiritual state of grace he had enjoyed in the Garden of Eden).

Gnosticism (belief that the physical world is debased but man can ascend in spirit) or the Kabbalah (Jewish mysticism based

on the power of the Hebrew alphabet and numerals), or all three.

These included the jailbird and former seminary student Éliphas Lévi, credited as the father of modern occultism, and the flamboyant figure of Joséphin Péladan, who called himself Le Sâr—the Babylonian title for king. Péladan was ostensibly a Martinist, but built bridges by resurrecting



The Sphinx is Khnopff's best-known work and depicts Oedipus nested next to the eponymous creature.

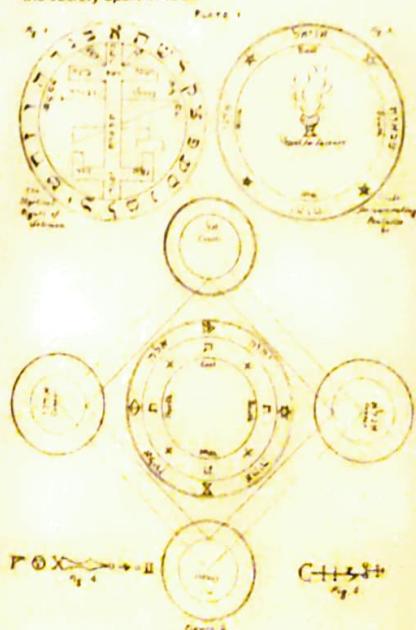
A New Dawn

No other organisation conjures up such feverish imagery as is associated with so many larger-than-life characters (not all of whom were actually members) nor played such a vital role in transitioning the occult from the late 19th century and into the 20th as the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn.

The origin story is a bit of a fog of self-mythologizing courtesy of some of its more infamous members such as Aleister Crowley, but what we know for fact is that the Golden Dawn was founded in 1887 by Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers, William Robert Woodman and William Wyn Westcott, based on a text they claimed was a recently deciphered Rosicrucian manuscript. The duo dutifully built their new society around the rituals contained within, which they insisted—dubiously—to be of ancient Egyptian origin.

Lineage was incredibly important to late 19th-century occultists, but their influences were more recent and that's what made the Golden Dawn such a potent distillation of the entire occult revival to date. It liberally helped itself to elements of theosophy, cosmology, Kabbalah, rituals, astrology, alchemy, astral travel and the tarot, and Byzantine Rosicrucian rites and initiations.

Unlike earlier orders, the focus of the Golden Dawn was on practical magic and ritual, and so it found itself attracting the hungriest and most ambitious of occultists. These fiercely intelligent and competitive intellectuals thrived in the hierarchy of different ranks and levels, and—especially Crowley—had a marvellous time pulling the society apart in 1903.



Kabbalist sigils from Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers' translation of the Renaissance grimoire *The Key of Solomon*

"Magic didn't mean a retreat from Christianity, nor was it in opposition to scientific thinking"

Guido von List expounded a modern Pagan new religious movement known as Wotanism

the Rosicrucian Brotherhood as a modern secret society alongside the prominent occultists Stanislas de Guaita and Gérard Encausse, and founded the Salón de la Rose+Croix for the Symbolists to exhibit their work and share their ideas.

A rather shrill and scandal-prone bunch, the leading lights of French occultism feuded constantly. Stanislas de Guaita hated Joseph Baudan, a defrocked priest and alleged satanist who was rumoured to have killed a child during a black mass and practiced spiritual healing through sexual intercourse.

When Baudan passed away in 1893, Joris Karl Huysmans accused Guaita and Péladan of having killed him with black magic. Huysmans lashed out in a heavily fictionalised pulp

Queen Victoria and Abraham Lincoln both met with mediums in order to contact their deceased loved ones

BARNUM HYPNOTIST

Mesmerism was a well established form of music hall entertainment



Double exposure creates the illusion of a ghost hovering over an elderly couple

expose *La Bas (Down There)* which did as much to inspire the look of Satanism than anything that real occultists ever did.

Just as magic didn't necessarily mean a retreat from Christianity, nor was it necessarily in opposition to scientific thinking. Instead the occult was another means to interpret a world that was only just beginning to be understood in any real kind of detail.

In a sense too, the growing confidence of the scientific worldview in tipping over the old certainties left what remained indecipherable up for grabs by concepts that seemed just as esoteric to the layman as bacteria or electrons.

Art movements love a good manifesto, and so the Belgian Symbolist Jean Delville spared few words in explaining his worldview in 1900's *New Mission in Art*.

The occult sciences, the lofty teachings of theosophy, and experimental Spiritualism, are setting out to conquer the future, and on the threshold of a new age, are about to establish the Science of the Ideal, that is the synthesis of science, religion, and philosophy.

Some ideas clung so close to science that they still wear its cast-offs as pseudoscience or parapsychology. Chief among them the doctrines of Spiritualism and mesmerism.

Mesmerism wasn't just hypnotism by another name. This art—the same one by which wandering holy man Grigori Rasputin claimed to be able to stem the internal bleeding of poor bloody Alexei, ill-fated heir to the Russian throne—was based on the premise that all living beings were governed by magnetic forces. The word "mesmerise" takes its name from its inventor, the 18th-century German physician

Péladan's *Le vice suprême* was interwoven with Rosicrucian and occult themes



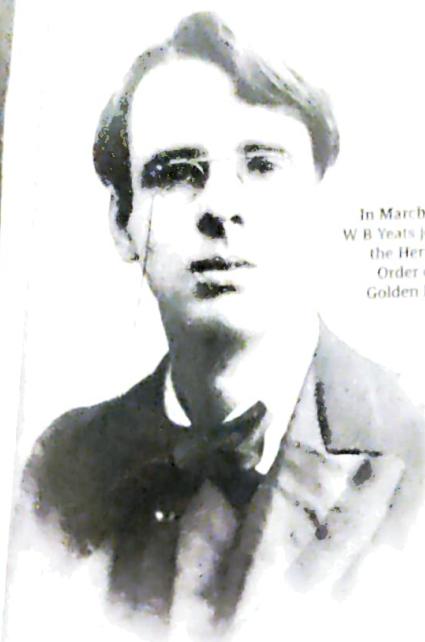
A séance appears to have attracted a ghostly visitor

Franz Anton Mesmer who also coined "animal magnetism" not to refer to physical attraction but the pull of celestial bodies on living creatures.

Through the use of magnetized wands and other props the practitioner could claim to cure the vaguely defined health issues that have always been fair game for quacks. Though quickly discredited, it lived on in the imagination of occultists and had a second wind from 1841 when Scottish surgeon James Braid certified the veracity of a French mesmerist's act and became convinced that suggestion was more important than magnets—which was spot on, although not in the way he thought—and replaced it with hypnotism.

Thanks to Braid, mesmerism not only became an established part of medical orthodoxy as both a sedative and means of prompting the body to heal itself, but returned to music halls and dinner parties as a popular phenomenon.

Spiritualism was born in the United States in the 1850s, and soon spread to the Old World. It existed independently of much of the day's occult milieu, and despite a crossover of interest, it captured the public imagination in a way that ritual magic and esoteric secret societies failed to dominate theatres with seances in which mediums purported to receive messages from dead loved ones. Lights dimmed, tables rattled and ectoplasm was vomited forth.



In March 1890
W.B. Yeats joined
the Hermetic
Order of the
Golden Dawn

Charles Henry Allan Bennett was more interested in enlightenment, and established the first Buddhist mission in Britain



Hypnotic Seance by Richard Berg shows a hypnotist at work in front of a rapt audience

The Gods Delusion

An ironic consequence of the scientific method was the idea that folklore and superstition represented a glimpse of pre-Christian religious practices, an essentially flawed premise that actually birthed new belief systems across the late 19th and early 20th century.

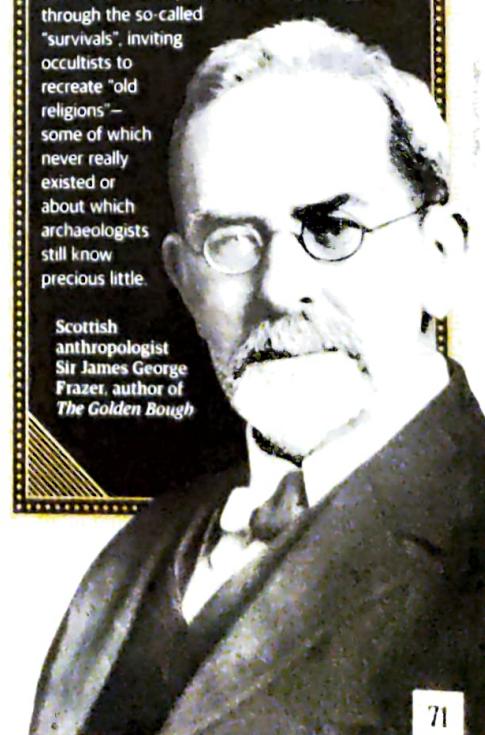
Anthropology emerged as a discipline in the mid-1800s and Europe's overseas empires offered an opportunity for inquiring minds to understand the nature of belief among what they once called the 'savages'.

Religion was organised and classified like insects under glass in an act of linear Eurocentric evolution in which fetishism (the imbuing of physical objects or locations with religious importance) gave way to polytheism (belief in multiple deities) which in turn gave way to monotheism (belief in a single deity), which was finally superseded by science.

The anthropologist Edward Burnett Tylor coined the idea of "survivals" in 1871, proposing that folklore, ritual and superstition was in fact a remnant of earlier belief systems. Tylor's theory prompted a flurry of folklore collection and study, most infamously in 13 volumes of Sir James Frazer's *The Golden Bough: A Study in Comparative Religion*, which were published between 1892 and 1913. (It was re-subtitled *A Study in Magic and Religion* in its second and subsequent editions.)

Frazer's hastily drawn conclusions and cherry-picking research would prove profoundly influential in underscoring the alleged commonalities of pre-Christian mythology, and through the so-called "survivals", inviting occultists to recreate "old religions"—some of which never really existed or about which archaeologists still know precious little.

Scottish anthropologist Sir James George Frazer, author of *The Golden Bough*



The Vedic Scriptures of Hinduism include a range of spirits, some of which could technically be classified as demons

Demons are often depicted in Christian art, like in this painting of Saint Francis by 17th century artist Antonio Busca

Demonology

Demons play a large part in religion, in both a literal and metaphorical sense. But Muslims, Hindus, Christians and more all have their own interpretations...

Written by Poppy-Jay Palmer

It may sound like a made-up Hogwarts class, but there's far more to demonology than meets the eye. It doesn't just cover the study of demons; it also involves the study of methods used to summon and control them.

With the term 'demon' being pretty common in both literature and common language,

what actually constitutes a demon has become clouded over the years.

Essentially, they are supernatural and often malevolent beings that enter into relations with the human race. However, not all depictions of demons are so negative. In ancient Greek mythology, for example, the word 'daimon' symbolizes a spirit or divine power.

The most common idea of what demons specifically look like is usually the one concocted by Christianity: all cloven hooves, horns and pitchforks, but demons can be very different depending on which religions you're looking at. In the past, demons have generally been classified as spirits, but the similarities across different cultures end there.

In Christian demonology, the study of demons from a purely Christian point of view, the spirits are thought of as corrupted angels that fell from grace. Some scholars have traced demons in the early Greek Old Testament back to two separate mythologies of evil: Adamic, which ties it with the fall of man caused by Adam and Eve, and Enochic, involving the fall of angels in the antediluvian period. Nowadays, not all Christians believe demons to be literal beings, and

rather see the language of exorcism in the New Testament as metaphors for modern healing methods.

In Buddhism, it is believed that the hell realms of rebirth are manned by demons, with a demon named Mara in charge as chief tempter, that torment sinners, tempt mortals to sin, and attempt to prevent their enlightenment. It was widely thought that the imminent decline of Buddhism could be brought about by demonic influences when the religion first reached China in the 1st century CE. The idea of demons has also been extremely present in Indian Buddhism.

Unlike other religions, Islam doesn't have a doctrinal hierarchy of demonology. Some people see djinn as demons, but others don't. However, certain types of djinn have been classified within Islam, like Amir, a Djinni that lives among humans; Shaitan, a malicious and rebellious djinn; Marid, a stronger version of Shaitan that steals news from heaven; and Ifrit, the most powerful type of Shayateen.



Indian spectators gather around effigies of the Hindu demons Ravana, Meghnath and Kumbhkar before setting them alight

St Michael subdues Satan, who is usually seen in Christianity and Islam as a fallen angel or djinn





Éliphas Lévi

A holy man with a chequered past and a prison record, Lévi defined occultism well into the first decade of the 20th century

Written by James Hoare

Que of the most seemingly contradictory figures in the history of the occult, Éliphas Lévi—born Alphonse-Louis Constant in France in 1810—was a devout Christian.

He was a former seminary student who used the title Abbé (Abbot) and wore the robes to match, yet this man of the cloth inspired Aleister Crowley so directly that the “Wickedest Man in the World” claimed to be inhabited by his reincarnated soul. He went to prison twice for his radical politics, and he was dogged by rumours of a relationship with a teenage girl that saw him tossed out of the church.

Lévi’s approach to magic found its home in Britain with the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn and the writer AE Waite, a man who more than any other popularized the tarot and its interpretation in the English-speaking world. These are all associations that inspire shrill accusations of

Satanism and blasphemy that still endure in some quarters, yet Lévi was adamant that all he did was true to his faith.

A zealous Christian from an early age, Alphonse-Louis Constant’s religious awakening at his first Holy Communion was so all-consuming that the parish priest dispatched him to the seminary of St Nicholas, where he would train for a life in the Roman Catholic church. At St Nicholas the young scholar fell under the influence of the Abbé Frère, who dabbled in the emerging occult sciences of mesmerism (the belief that an invisible magnetic force governed all living things and could be used to heal them) and Martinism (a form of Christian mysticism popular in 19th century France).

The Abbé was soon relieved of his duties and the atmosphere turned hostile to those students who had fallen under his influence. The deflated Constant left St Nicholas for the seminary of



DEFINING MOMENT

A Christian radical

Lévi's 1841 book *The Bible of Liberty* called for a more just society worthy of Christ's return. It was pulled from the shelves and he was sent to prison. He found himself deeply immersed in radical politics in a very unstable time for France.

After his failure to win a seat in the National Assembly, Lévi became disillusioned with politics and dedicated himself to his occult research.

1841-1848

A 1992 portrait of Eliphas Lévi by Gordon Wain

The look of Black Magic

Although Lévi saw magic through a Christian lens, his work has done much to codify what it is we think of when we picture 'black magic'.

The idea of a point-up pentagram being 'good' and a point-down pentagram being 'bad' comes from Lévi and is now an established part of the iconography of occultism, Satanism and contemporary paganism.

Another diabolic legacy is the depiction of Baphomet as a goat-headed figure (also referred to as the Goat of Mendes). The deity supposedly worshipped by the Knights Templar was described in various ways under torture—a severed head, a head with three faces, a skull, and a cat head—but it was Lévi who illustrated the 'devil goat' for the first time in *Dogma and Ritual of High Magic*.

Lévi's Baphomet imagery became incredibly important to Aleister Crowley in the development of Thelema and influenced the Devil card in AE Waite's popular Rider-Waite tarot deck, firmly bedding it into the popular imagination. Perhaps its most famous big screen appearance is in the climax of 1968 Hammer horror film *The Devil Rides Out*.

Eliphas Lévi was also a significant influence on the writer HP Lovecraft at the time he was developing his 'Cthulhu Mythos', and Lovecraft refers to him directly in his 1927 short story 'The Case of Charles Dexter Ward', lifting an evocation straight from Waite's translation of *Dogma and Ritual*.

Eliphas Lévi's goat-headed Baphomet, from *Transcendental Magic: its Doctrine and Ritual*



The 'seven planets' of the Solar System and their aspects, illustrated by Lévi



Constant's birthplace in Paris's sixth arrondissement. His father was a shoemaker

St Suplice where "they focused on the slow and painful learning of ignorance." But at least he was left to his own devices. It was here that he first became troubled by contradictions within the Bible—that a loving God could also wield eternal damnation as a flail.

Now a young man, it was at St Suplice where Constant had his controversial relationship with the 14 year old Adèle Allenbach. According to Constant she was a penniless waif that he was entrusted with preparing for communion, and slowly they grew "affectionate". His "innocent and open" relationship attracted no small amount of gossip, but he claims that rather than being defrocked, he was never actually ordained as a priest and instead departed "as a matter of conscience".

Constant took teaching jobs by day and spent his nights working on his masterpiece, *The Bible of Liberty*, which he felt addressed both his doctrinal anxieties and his growing frustration at social injustice. He was offered a bribe by the church to junk his manuscript, but refused, remaking wryly that it was the first time the church had deemed him worthy of financial support.

The Bible of Liberty was published on 13 February 1841 and remained on sale for about an hour

before copies were seized by the police and Constant was sentenced to eight months for "impiety" and "advocating insurrection". His trial made him into something of a celebrity among the radicals of Paris.

Released in April 1842 (he served 11 months in the end), Constant tried to keep himself to himself, he penned a few articles for radical newspapers but it was distinct sideline to his study. He was given a second chance with the church and moved out of

Paris to take up employment under his mother's maiden name—but the press caught up with him, declaring at first he had died and then announcing his "resurrection" and exposing his whereabouts.

In the ensuing scandal,

Constant returned to

Paris and continued

to publish his

religious and political

writings, some of which

he claimed were inspired

by visions. On 3 February 1847 Constant was hauled

before the judge again for his

politic *The Voice of Justice*

and was charged with "disturbing public

order by provoking and inciting hatred between the several classes of society".

In the end he only served six months, thanks to an appeal from his pregnant young wife, the sculptor Marie Noëmi Cadiot. Over the rest of the decade following the February Revolution of 1848

DEFINING MOMENT

The father of the Occult Revival

Until his death in 1875, Lévi made his living through his writing and teaching. In 1854, Lévi visited London for the first time and the audience asked him to invoke the spirit of the ancient Greek magician Apollonius of Tyana—Spiritualism being the dominant occult art in Britain at the time. He was taken aback, but gave it a go.

1850s-1875



when he stood for the French National Assembly and failed to win a seat, he became increasingly disillusioned with politics and began to dedicate himself fully to spiritual matters.

Specifically he became enthused with kabbalah, a form of ancient Jewish mysticism (historians now believe it dates from the 12th century) based around the idea that the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet and the numbers one to ten each hold specific power.

In 1853, the year his wife left him, Constant began publishing under the pseudonym Eliphas Lévi Zaed (although the Zaed part was rarely used) which he asserted was the Hebrew translation of his birth name. In 1854 and 1855 the two volumes of his text *Dogma and Ritual of High Magic* were published.

Abbe Constant, the Christian revolutionary was gone and in his place stood Eliphas Lévi, the father of modern occultism. *Dogma and Ritual...*

Levi's Star of the Microcosm' contains the Tetragrammaton and the Hebrew name Adam, representing man as a reflection of God's power



THE PENTAGRAM.

Seal of the Microcosm

He also wrote on the tarot, and the tarot deck, the four suits and the four elements, all of which informed his High Magic.

He explained that magic and religion were not in conflict, the secret of magic was the means by which these five forces could be manipulated.

The most powerful kabbalistic combination was the Tetragrammaton, HHVH, the four Hebrew characters that make up the name of God or Jehovah. Levi linked these to the four suits of the tarot deck (wands, cups, swords and coins/pentacles) through a Renaissance tradition that linked them to the four elements (fire, water, air and earth), establishing the tarot as the overarching framework for his particular interpretation of the magical art.

To put it simply: if kabbalah was the secret language of the universe, then the tarot was the dictionary defining it.

Like the kabbalah, the tarot deck had 22 major arcana (the 'hero' cards such as The Fool, Death and The Hanged Man) and the suits of the minor arcana (such as the Three of Swords or Eight of Wands) were numbered one through ten.

1860's *The History of Magic* and 1861's *The Key to the Great Mysteries* developed those themes (which he repeated ad infinitum in later texts, rattled out at a plenteous rate). In them Levi reconciled accounts of sorcery, alchemy, and Biblical miracle into a single belief system that saw Jesus Christ stand alongside Renaissance alchemist and astrologer Paracelsus as magi, men who reshaped the world through magic.

Levi's work didn't catch on in France with anywhere near the fervour with which it was adopted in the English-speaking world. There it became part of the rich stew of cherry-picked superstition and pagan leftovers that informed the ritual magic of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn and the belief in ancient mystical masters espoused by the Russian-born emigré Madame Blavatsky and her Theosophical Society.

Levi didn't live to see the extent of his occult legacy. He died in 1875, three years before Blavatsky published *Iris Unveiled*, her first major work, and 12 years before three disillusioned Freemasons in smoking jackets gathered together to explore the mysteries of the universe, passing their wisdom on to

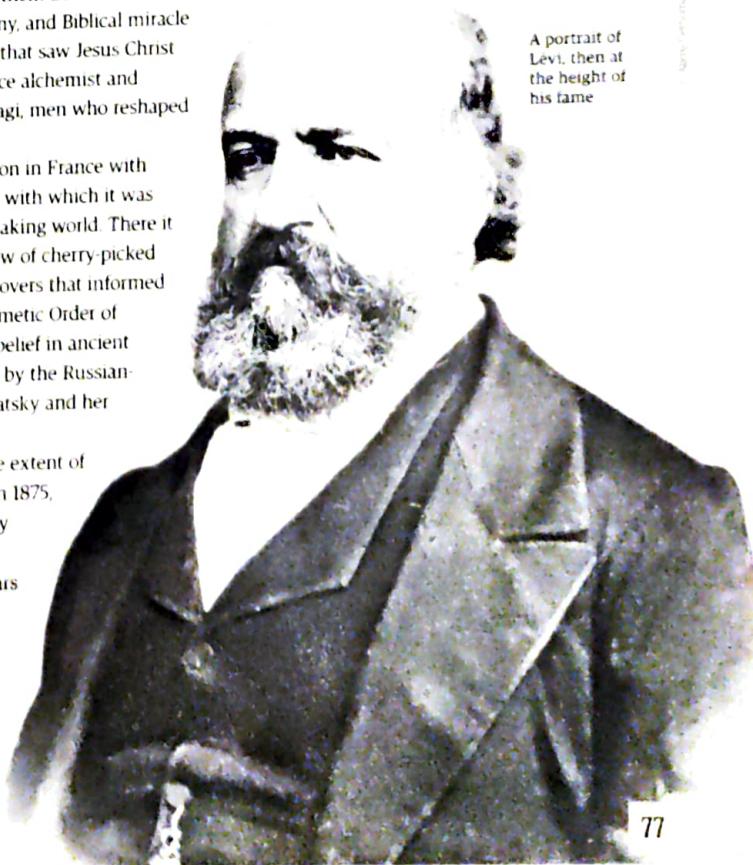
the world. From that moment on, Levi's ideas were adopted by the likes of Aleister Crowley, the高貴的魔術師, and the Golden Dawn. Crowley, it is believed, had cracked the code of the Tarot of his time, indeed all tarot he may well have been appalled by the rise of self-absorbed hedonists and humanists like Crowley, who brushed Levi's deeply held Christian convictions to one side as a mere prop in order to run amok through his rituals.

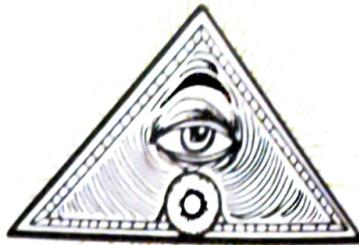
Or perhaps Eliphas Lévi, that most unlikely father of occultism and most unorthodox of true believers would simply have turned the other cheek.

"Father, forgive them," said Jesus, 'for they know not what they do.' People of good sense whoever you may be, I will add, do not listen to them, for they know not what they say."

The Great Secret or Occultism Unveiled (1868)

A portrait of Levi, then at the height of his fame





The magical life of Aleister Crowley

Mystic, philosopher, author, poet, controversialist, adventurer through the landscape of the mind—there were few taboos that the so-called 'wickedest man in the world' did not explore

Written by Joel McIver

Chances are, if the late Aleister Crowley had been born in 1975, rather than 1875, his public antics as a magician, drug user and sexual experimenter would have been welcomed, or at least tolerated, in the modern world. In his own era, however, his keen interest in occult thought and practice, plus his deliberate attempts to gain infamy for its own sake, provoked rather than intrigued the public, and he was castigated as a serious threat. In reality, Crowley was simply an interesting, if unorthodox, man who loved the attention which his activities brought to him. There is no equivalent to him today, which makes the story of his life all the more compelling.

Much has been written about Crowley as an occult thinker and activist, and also about

his personal life. In fact, these two sides of his character are too deeply entwined for them to be meaningfully separated. From his earliest years, he found himself in conflict with his surroundings and it's little wonder that he grew up to be a man profoundly at odds with the mores of his era.

Edward Crowley, as he was known until his late teens, was born at 30 Clarendon Square in Royal Leamington Spa, Warwickshire, to a family of comfortable means. His father, also Edward Crowley, owned a share in a successful brewing business, Crowley's Alton Ales, and had already retired by the time his son was born. Like his wife Emily, Edward senior was a member of the Exclusive Brethren, a faction of the better-known Plymouth Brethren, which was a Christian



Ceremonial garments were an integral part of Crowley's rituals, but they often caused people to dismiss him as a serious thinker

How to perform the Abramelin Ritual

Abramelin was a 14th century Egyptian magician and the subject of study by Crowley's associate **Samuel Mathers**. He is said to have created the Abramelin Ritual (or Operation), in which a devout person can receive "knowledge and conversation of their Higher Guardian Angel". The Ritual was originally intended to last a grueling 18 months, but Crowley adapted it to last a more manageable six. Fancy a crack at it? Here's how...

First, you need to be in good health, between 25 and 50 years old, and religious. It doesn't matter which religion you adhere to, you just need to acknowledge a god of some kind. You'll need two rooms, a prayer room and an adjoining bedroom, in which you will remain most of the time. For the first two months, spend the hours of daylight (yes, all of them) praying to your chosen deity, studying holy books and taking the occasional walk. For the second two months, include a day of fasting in each week.

Over the last two months, wear a special tunic, burn charcoal, build an altar and get ready for the big day. When it comes, anoint yourself in sacred oil, write Crowley's sacred texts on your altar, invoke the 12 Kings and Dukes of Hell—including Lucifer, Satan, Leviathan and Belial—and await your angelic visitor.

THE BOOK OF THE SACRED MAGIC OF ABRAMELIN THE MAGI

Translated by
S. L. MacGregor Mathers

Samuel Mathers' *Book of the Sacred Magic of Abramelin* (1900), in which Mathers detailed the exhausting Abramelin Ritual

myself. He is said to have worked as a doctor in Paris, then moved to have lived with Mathers in London, and the two of them formed the Order of the Golden Dawn, continuing the ritual Abramelin (1887), and the tale of the "Sorceress" (woman) he created from "nothing".

Crowley's father died from the bubonic plague in 1883 when he was just 11. The year after, his mother died, leaving him with only 11 shillings. Crowley inherited two-thirds of his father's wealth but this, however, seems to have made him happy. His relationship with his mother deteriorated; he later wrote that "her peasant, maternal instincts were suppressed by religion to the point that she became, after her husband's death, a brainless bigot."



Crowley in the ceremonial garb of the Order of the Golden Dawn, an occult organisation

of the most notorious occultists of the 20th century. Tom Paine, who was born and educated in Leamington Spa, founded the Order of the Golden Dawn in 1887. The Sethian house, in fact, was "the most hellish house in Leamington Spa" because no creature "had ever walked the Earth".

Worse still, when Crowley began to cause trouble at his school, Ebor Preparatory School—Cambridge, its owner the Reverend James Champney, was quick and sadistic. Crowley was punished by being placed in solitary in Coventry, where no student or master could speak to him, or be to him. He was fed only with bread and water, forced to walk around the schoolroom and isolated on the playground. These sadistic measures led him to describe his stay at Ebor as "a boyhood in hell". A satanic edge was added to the situation by his mother's nickname for her son—"the Beast".

The pressures of the young Crowley's situation led him to ill health, firstly with albuminuria, a kidney disorder. This was no doubt worsened by some of the other boys at Ebor, who saw fit to punch him in the kidneys when they discovered his illness. In due course, his mother and uncle removed him from the tender mercies of Reverend Champney and sent him to Malvern College and Tonbridge School, neither of which he enjoyed.

Ultimately he was educated by private tutors in Eastbourne, East Sussex, against whose Christian teachings the teenage Crowley rebelled by pointing out flaws in the Bible. Privately, he enjoyed the forbidden practice of masturbation, of which he wrote: "Here was certainly a sin worth sinning, and I applied myself with characteristic vigour to its practice." This habit soon graduated to sleeping with local prostitutes, one of whom he later contracted gonorrhoea from.

30. Clarendon Square in Leamington Spa, Warwickshire—Crowley's birthplace. The building indicates the wealth of his family



"Crowley rebelled by pointing out flaws in the Bible"

From today's comparatively enlightened point of view, we can see clearly that the scene was set and the seeds were sown for Crowley's career of anti-establishment activities to begin. Here was a young man, barely more than a boy, jolted by his early death of his father (who he later described as a 'hero', apparently sincerely), repelled by over-eager disciplinarians and contemptuous of revealed religion. As an intelligent, educated youth with money of his own, he was free—once he left the family home, at least—to wreak the worst kind of havoc that he could.

In 1895, Crowley adopted the first name Aleister. "I had read in some book or other," he wrote, "that the most favourable name for becoming famous was one consisting of a dactyl [a long syllable plus two short ones] followed by a spondee [two long syllables], as at the end of a hexameter. like Jeremy Taylor. 'Aleister Crowley' fulfilled these conditions and Aleister is the Gaelic form of Alexander. To adopt it would satisfy my romantic ideals."

In line with his new identity, Crowley developed new interests—chess and mountaineering among them, both of which he indulged after beginning a degree in philosophy at Trinity College, Cambridge. He also wrote poetry for student newspapers such as *The Granta* and *Cartab*, switching his degree to English literature.

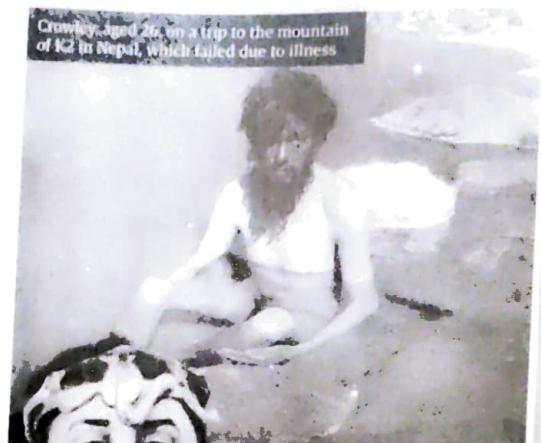
In 1896, at the age of 21, he endured another paradigm change. Before this point Crowley had been just another regular, if rebellious, young man—afterwards, he was a keen devotee of the mystical world. It's thought that he enjoyed a homosexual liaison while on holiday in Sweden, although this was never confirmed. Whatever the case, Crowley returned a changed man, apparently comfortable with being bisexual at a time when this was generally deemed abhorrent. He then struck up a relationship with Herbert Charles Pollitt, the president of the Cambridge University Footlights Dramatic Club, and the two men were a couple for two years, eventually breaking up when Crowley's interest in Western esoterism became all-consuming.

The final opportunity for Crowley to pursue a normal career came and went in 1897 when he travelled to Russia in the employ of the

British secret service, which had attempted to enlist him as a spy. However, a spate of illness deterred Crowley from the idea of working for a living—no doubt helped by the fact that he was a man of independent means—and he resolved to pursue his obsession with the occult, now a huge driving passion for him. In 1898 he abandoned his university studies, not bothering to sit his final exams, even though his record indicated that he would probably do well if he had chosen to take them.

Where did all this unrest come from? Perhaps Crowley's desire to be a poet (he published several poems in 1898, some of them of an erotic nature); possibly his new interest in alchemy (he had met a chemist, Julian L Baker, of similar views to his own); or simply his occult readings.

Crowley, aged 26, on a trip to the mountain of K2 in Nepal, which failed due to illness



Crowley in magisterial mode in 1912. As the First World War approached, his activities began to adopt a political edge

Some biographers suggest that Crowley remained a British Intelligence spy throughout his life





Crowley's best-known work, *The Book of the Law*, which contains many of his early philosophical thoughts

Two books AF Waite's *The Book of Black Magic and of Pacts* (1898) and Karl von Eckartshausen's *The Cloud Upon the Sanctuary* (1896) influenced Crowley profoundly. He took an important step into making these interests concrete by joining an occult society known as the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, which had been founded in 1888. He was introduced to the Order by George Cecil Jones, Baker's brother in law

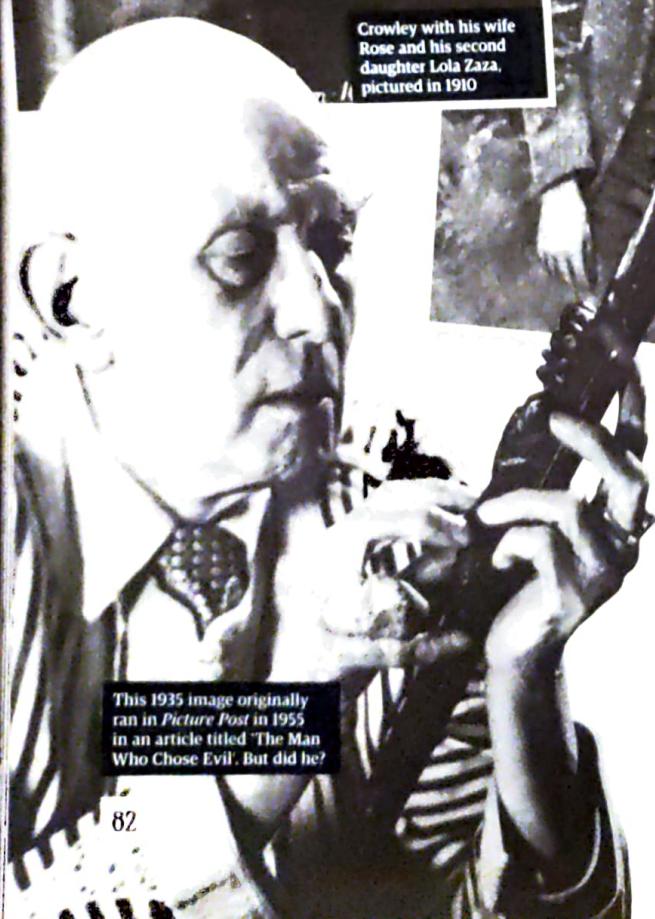
Although Crowley was introduced to two influential people through the Order, its leader Samuel Mathers, and a magician named Allan Bennett, who later shared Crowley's flat in Chancery Lane—his connection with the organisation was rocked by disagreement. While



Crowley with his wife Rose and his second daughter Lola Zaza, pictured in 1910



Pictured around 1890, Edward Crowley, as he was then known, showed no outward sign of the chaos to come



This 1935 image originally ran in *Picture Post* in 1955 in an article titled 'The Man Who Chose Evil. But did he?

The hexagram symbol of Thlema is unicursal, meaning that it can be drawn in a single line

Bennett taught Crowley about the Goetia (the summoning of demons), the ritual use of drugs (in particular hashish, legal to use in Britain until 1928), and Kabbalah (ancient Jewish mysticism). Crowley wanted to move faster through the Order's ranks than was permitted.

By now determined to explore the world of the occult to its limit, in 1899 Crowley purchased a Scottish mansion, Boleskine House, on the shore of Loch Ness. Here he attempted the exhausting Abramelin Operation, a six-month ritual in which a disciple seeks to converse with a personal guardian angel, invoking demonic spirits at the same time. The same year he published more poetry collections, one of which, *Jephthah*, was a success.

Although Crowley made progress through the various grades of the Order of the Golden Dawn, he was unpopular in the group thanks to the reputation he had gained from being a bisexual sybarite, and he conflicted with members including the poet WB Yeats. The Order's London lodge refused to allow him entry into its Second Order, although Samuel Mathers did so after Crowley visited him in Paris. This caused a schism between Mathers and the Order, which became irrevocable when Crowley—on Mathers' orders—attempted to storm and occupy the Order's temple building in Kensington. The case went to court, and the Order won—Crowley and Mathers were expelled.

However, Crowley was just getting started on his bizarre journey, both physical and spiritual. In 1900 he travelled to Mexico, where he settled in Mexico City with a local mistress and worked with Enochian magic. While there he was initiated into the Freemasons, wrote poems and a play and climbed mountains such as Iztaccihuatl, Popocatepetl and Colima. He then headed to San Francisco and Hawaii, enjoying an affair with a married woman named Mary Rogers on the ship for good measure.

After stopovers in Japan and Hong Kong, Crowley reached Sri Lanka (then known as Ceylon), where he met Allan Bennett, who had moved there to study Shaivism; the latter decided to train as a Buddhist monk and went to Burma. Crowley chose to travel to India, studying raja yoga, a variant of Hindu astrology.

The sheer amount of esoteric beliefs that Crowley had absorbed by this point was prodigious. Still only in his late 20s, his greatest period of activity—both physical and mental—was upon him. In 1902 he attempted to climb the mountain K2, which had not yet been conquered at the time. However, influenza, malaria and snow blindness meant that his group only made it to 6,700 yards before turning back.

Later that year he settled in Paris, where he gained a measure of local fame among the urban

intelligentsia. As a published poet, occult scholar and man of deviant sexual habits by the standard of the day, he was welcomed in *fin de siècle* Paris and became friends with the painter Gerald Kelly and the author W. Somerset Maugham. Art, philosophy and his extraordinarily vivid lifestyle enthralled Crowley this year, making him one of the outstanding figures of his time (a view that himself was quick to endorse).

Another key moment in his personal evolution came in 1904. By then Crowley had returned to Boleskine House, married Gerald's sister Rose—deeply distressing the Kelly family in doing so—and travelled with her to Cairo, where the couple claimed to be a prince and princess for their own, arcane reasons. However, this was no simple pleasure trip. While in Cairo, Crowley underwent the most profound spiritual experience of his life.

On 18 March Rose—who had become delirious, in a form of hallucinatory trance—told Crowley that the Egyptian god Horus was waiting for him. Two days later, she announced, "The Equinox of the Gods has come!" She took him to a nearby museum, containing a 7th-century BCE mortuary stele known as the Stele of Ankh-ef-en-Khonsu. The exhibit's number was 666.

On 8, 9 and 10 April, for exactly one hour at noon on each day, Crowley—seated in his apartment—was addressed by a disembodied voice, identifying itself as Aiwass, the messenger of Horus. He claimed to have written down Aiwass' words verbatim, and soon after turned these words into a book, *Liber L vel Legis*, better known

"He took an important step into making these interests concrete by joining an occult society"

as *The Book of the Law*. The cornerstone of the book was the statement "Do what thou wilt—shall be the whole of the Law", which may have been controversial at the time but now resonates in the era of libertarianism. This, and the book itself, became the foundation of a religion, Thelema, which Crowley went on to develop.

70 years after Crowley's death, the "Do what thou wilt" credo, *The Book of the Law* and Thelema itself are still very much part of any conversation on the subject of alternative belief systems. It's amazing to think that all this work was essentially done by the time he reached the age of

30. Of course, he continued to work at developing and disseminating his beliefs, returning once more to Boleskine and becoming a father to his first child, a daughter. He and Rose saw fit to saddle the child with the name Nuit Ma Ahathoor Hecate Sappho Jezebel Lilith Crowley,

referring to her as Lilith (after the

Biblical demon) for convenience.

Although he was admired in occult quarters for his work, Crowley's life was rarely easy from this point on. He fell out with Mathers, claiming that his former colleague had sent an 'astral vampire' to attack him. Vampirism in general was a subject that fascinated Crowley, but not of the familiar, Dracula-style bloodsucking type. To him, vampires could be psychic in nature, feeding on mental energy. This rendered them difficult to combat, as well as impossible to see—perhaps usefully for the purposes of Crowley's propaganda.

Needless to say, few people took ideas about vampires seriously, and of his attempts at invisibility, the *Manchester Guardian* drily wrote in 1943, "Mr Crowley declines to make himself invisible in court."

Writing in *The London Sunday Dispatch* on 25 June 1933, Crowley outlined some of his more outrageous claims for the benefit of the readers. Whether they took him seriously or not, who can say? There is no doubt, however, that the tales of his occult explorations made for entertaining reading over tea and toast that morning.

Crowley spent a lot of time discussing his recent attempts to make himself invisible—a feat that he claimed to have partly achieved in front of a mirror. Venturing out in public, he realized that he could not be seen. "I was able to walk out in a scarlet- and gold robe with a jeweled crown on my head without attracting any attention. They could not see me," he wrote.

Elsewhere, Crowley wrote of his falling-out with his former colleague in the Order of the Golden Dawn, Samuel Mathers, in fantastical terms. In particular, he claimed that Mathers had sent an 'astral vampire' to attack him. Vampirism in general was a subject that fascinated Crowley, but not of the familiar, Dracula-style bloodsucking type. To him, vampires could be psychic in nature, feeding on mental energy. This rendered them difficult to combat, as well as impossible to see—perhaps usefully for the purposes of Crowley's propaganda.

Crowley's concept of vampirism differed from that of Hollywood horror films. To him, vampires could feed on mental energy

The Kanchenjunga climb was conquered in 1955, 50 years after Crowley's own unsuccessful attempt

Lilith sadly died at only two years old. Rose, by now suffering from alcoholism, bore a second daughter, Lola Zaza, although Crowley embarked on various affairs before divorcing Rose in 1909.

Through all this, Crowley continued to attempt the Abramelin Operation, completing it at a hotel in Surrey. He claimed afterwards to have achieved a state of samadhi, or union with God, as well as conversing once more with his old chum Awass and writing more Thelemic books as a result. Even supposing these supernatural liaisons were not fictional, they did nothing to help his finances, which were running out. He remained in a precarious financial state for the rest of his life, not helped by a growing addiction to cocaine.

Still, nothing could stop him from defying the conventions of the time. His relationship with a

disciple, Victor Neuburg, was based on sadomasochism—while visiting Algeria, the pair engaged in a sex magic ritual on a mountain summit and invoked the demon Choronzon with a blood sacrifice. A vehicle was clearly required for his ongoing philosophy, and so he and George Cecil Jones founded the A.A.A., a group that infused the ideals of the Order of the Golden Dawn with Thelemic thought. The group's temple was located at 124 Victoria Street in London, where a biannual pamphlet, *The Equinox*, was published.

Crowley continued to write and publish into his middle years and beyond. In 1912 his *Book of Lies* gained some notoriety when Theodor Reuss, the head of yet another occult group, the German Ordo Tempus Occultis (OTO), accused Crowley of publishing some of the OTO's secrets. Crowley persuaded Reuss that he was innocent and the two

became friends, with Reuss later appointing Crowley as the head of the OTO's British branch: the Mysteria Mysteria Maxima. Hilariously, Crowley took upon himself the title of Baphomet, X^o Supreme Rex and Sovereign Grand Master General of Ireland, Iona, and all the Britons.

From now on, Crowley appeared at regular intervals in the popular press, with



As this classic Crowley image indicates, he liked to cultivate a sinister image. The reality was somewhat different

readers perceiving him as somewhere between a credible sorcerer and a clown. By 1914 he was broke and sold Boleskine House to move to New York, where he worked as a double agent for the British government with great efficacy—even persuading a German spy called Sylvester Viereck to give him a job on his newspaper, *The Fatherland*.

Thelema was always Crowley's primary focus throughout the decades, and after leaving the USA in 1919, he returned to London, where he was attacked by a tabloid called *John Bull*. Accused of being a traitor in its pages, Crowley chose not to sue the newspaper, although his status as an intelligence officer was by now common knowledge. He had bigger things on his mind—not least an addiction to heroin, which had been prescribed to treat his asthma.

Moving away from the toxic environment of London, he relocated to Cefalu on Sicily, Italy, to



Ass no questions: Crowley (and donkey) pictured on the former's first trip to the Himalayas in 1905



Pictures such as this one showed that Crowley liked to intimidate—but how much of it was pure theatre?



Defining moment

Crowley turns to the occult 1897

While at Cambridge, Crowley lives a dissipated life, exploring sexual liaisons with male and female partners. He also becomes an expert mountain climber, travelling to the Alps with his friend Oscar Eckenstein and making the first unguided ascent of the Monch peak. However, a previous—and undefined—mystical experience that he underwent in Stockholm in 1896 had set him on an esoterically spiritual path, and after a trip to Russia he suffers a short-lived period of illness. This leads Crowley to consider the reality of death and to dismiss all human endeavour as meaningless—and, although a diplomatic career is beckoning, he determines to pursue his burgeoning interest in occult matters.

Timeline

1875

Born in Leamington Spa, Warwickshire

Edward Alexander Crowley is born as the only child of Edward and Emily Crowley. His parents are members of the Exclusive Brethren, a Christian fundamentalist group.

12 October 1875

1887

Death of Crowley's father

The senior Edward Crowley dies in 1887 of tongue cancer when his son is only 11. Crowley later defines this moment as a turning point in his life, not least because he inherits a large fortune.

1887

Dissatisfied with the name Edward, Crowley adopts the name Aleister and goes up to Trinity College, Cambridge, to study philosophy. Later he switches to English literature.

1895

Changes name to Aleister

Crowley is initiated into the Outer Order of the Golden Dawn by the Order's leader, Samuel Mathers, later Crowley's close associate. He quickly progresses through the organisation's ranks.

Order of the Golden Dawn

Crowley is initiated into the Outer Order of the Golden Dawn by the Order's leader, Samuel Mathers, later Crowley's close associate. He quickly progresses through the organisation's ranks.

18 November 1898

Move to Boleskine House

Crowley styles himself as the 'laird of Boleskine' after buying this imposing property on Loch Ness. The house becomes infamous and is purchased in 1970 by Led Zeppelin guitarist Jimmy Page.

1899

A spiritual journey

Having visited Mexico, the USA, Japan, Hong Kong and Sri Lanka (then Ceylon), Crowley studies the Hindu practice of *raja* yoga. He claims to have achieved *dhyan*, or a state of perfect awareness.

1900



Crowley and his second wife, María de Miramar, around 1930. The couple married to enable María to enter Britain



'The Great Beast' had a sense of humour, dressing up here as a Chinese god of laughter

Defining moment

While in Cairo where he and his wife Rose invoke ancient Egyptian deities and study Islamic mysticism, Crowley begins his disembodied voice, delivering messages to him over a period of three days. The voice claims to be Aiwass, the messenger of Horus, elsewhere known as Horus the Great. Crowley writes down these messages and collates them into his book *The Book of the Law* or *The Legis or The Book of the Law*. In this volume he writes that the human race is poised to enter a new age of existence and that its prophet unsurprisingly is Crowley himself. His infamous slogan of 'Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law' is introduced here, and the book becomes the basis of his new religion Thelema.



wants

Death on the mountain

Crowley attempts to climb Kangchenjunga in the Himalayas, but his team is fractured by disagreement and the other climbers abandon the ascent. They die in an accident for which Crowley is blamed.



A debonair portrait of the soon-to-be "wickedest man in the world", taken around 1905

For all intents and purposes, that was the end of Crowley's life as a world power. He had lost the rest of his day-to-day influence in politics, although he was still possible to hire out of mind, the end. He was declared bankrupt in 1913, and then either Crowley, Randolph, or both, debtors, named Deinde Debtor, and running the big Alister Alston (The New World Order) Bank for a year. After Crowley was turned down by the Federal Intelligence Bureau when he offered them his services as a spy.

This day ended his life at a boarding house named Hetherwood in Elstree, where, perhaps, one that his time was limited, he spent his time appointing success to the left and the A. A. He died of chronic bronchitis aggravated by pleurisy and myocardial degeneration on December 1947 aged 77, naturally a reasonable life span for someone bereft by childhood illness and drug addiction in adulthood.



Crowley, quite the outdoors adventurer at this point in his life, seen in a reflective mood in 1907

Defining moment

Missing text of the history of the abbey and its lands and revenue at the time of the Dissolution. He believes that this period was one of perfect happiness, with much day labour and continual pilgrimage during masses, visits to shrines, and bringing up his many children, wife, nieces and others in the priory school, and that they always addressed him as 'my father' and 'my beloved father' because he was a father and founder of all these congregates of the Abbey. There are a series of warnings resulting from the death of a Thelkote based Lessing and the publication of *Ecclaeologiae book three of a living hand* eventually lead to his desecration from Italy and the closure of the Abbey.



1930

• False death of Crowley

After a move to Berlin and then to London, Crowley falls by own death. However, this doesn't stop him continuing his artistic career and several adventures across Europe.

1947

• Real death of Crowley

Conradie survived his chronic bronchitis, aggravated by long and heart disease, at the age of 77, a relatively old age for a man of his breed. His funeral was magnificently labelled a Black Mass by the tabloids.

Séances

Séances are widely seen as showmanship and hoaxes by many, but the origins of the practice are rooted in religion. Enter Spiritualism...

Written by Poppy-Jay Palmer

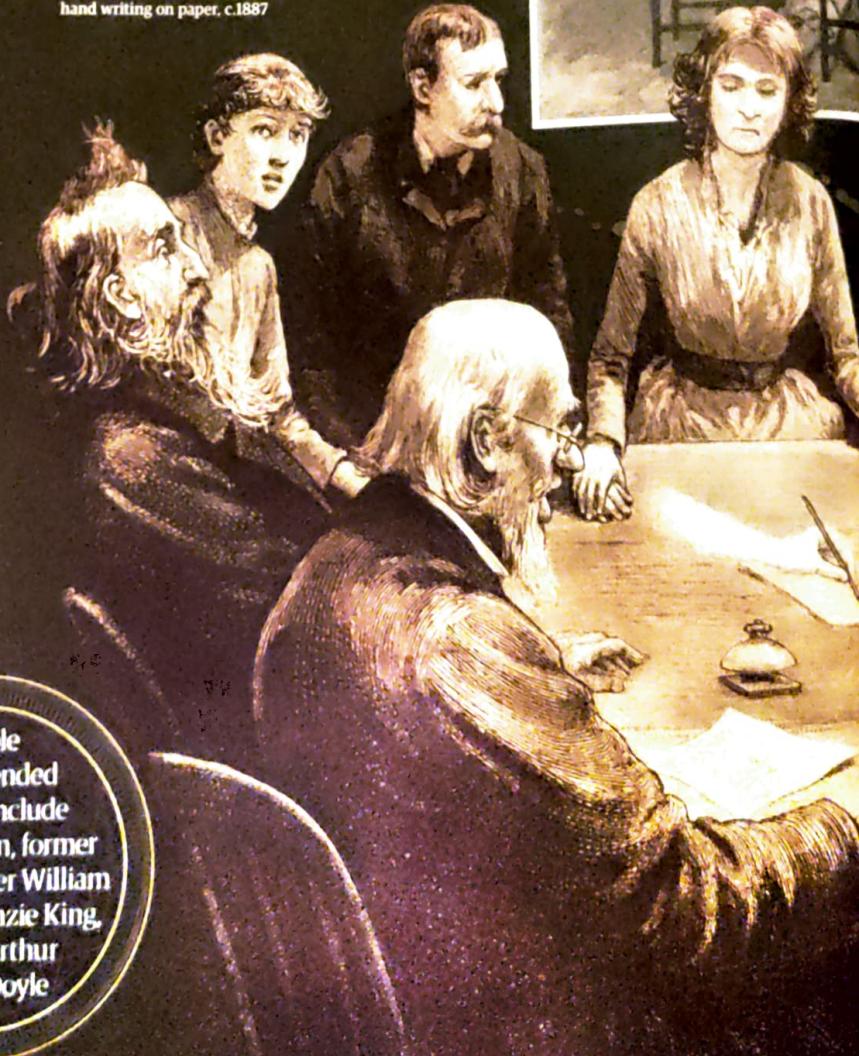
The word 'séance' comes directly from the French 'séance', meaning 'seat' and 'session', from the Old French 'seoir', meaning 'to sit'. So if you are ever holding a séance and not all participants are sitting down, it's technically not a séance!

Séances were, and are, used as a method of contacting the spirit world and talking to those who are no longer with us. Proper séances can be traced back to the 3rd century, and even back then they were closely related to occult practices and brought fear to the hearts of non-believers. However, it wasn't until the 19th century that the popularity of séances began to balloon. That popularity came with the creation of the religion Spiritualism, with founding sisters Kate and Margaret Fox quickly becoming popular for holding public séances in New York with the aim of contacting the dead.

Over the years, five different types of séances have been developed: religious séances, which are used during services as a way of communicating with living personalities in the spirit world (Spiritualists like to refer to them as 'receiving messages'), stage mediumship séances, which are held on stage in front of paying audiences; leader-assisted séances, where a small group usually gathered around a table is led by a medium conducting it; informal social séances, which involve neither a leader nor any kind of religious context; and Spiritualist séances, during which a medium connects with the spirit world and all

People at a séance appear to experience a guitar floating above their heads and a ghostly hand writing on paper, c.1887

People who attended séances include Robert Owen, former prime minister William Lyon Mackenzie King, and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle



present participants interact and speak with the personalities they believe they have summoned.

Some of the most famous séances of that particular era include those of First Lady Mary Todd Lincoln, who organized several sessions in the White House while grieving the loss of her son. They were extremely high profile, and were

attended by her husband President Abraham Lincoln as well as a number of other prominent members of US society.

Scientists, sceptics and atheists have always had more than their doubts. The art of the séance took a massive blow in 1887 with the Seybert Commission and its investigation into a number

of respected Spiritualist mediums. Their report decried them as frauds and showmen. Outside of slumber parties, séances are still being used as part of the religious services of Spiritualists, Spiritist, and Espiritismo churches to this day, but they usually place more emphasis on the spiritual aspect than on the showmanship.

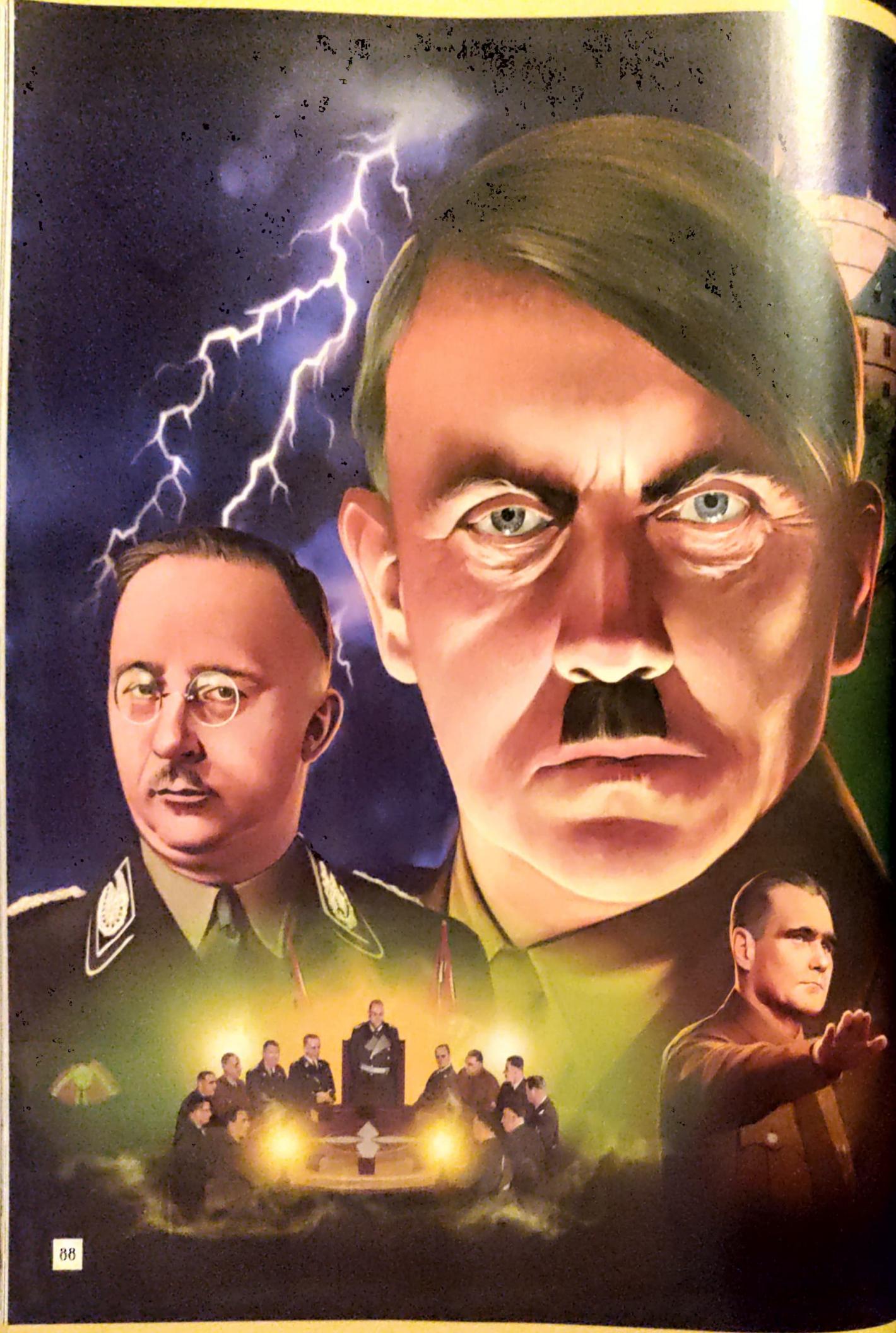
“Séances were, and are, used as a method of contacting the spirit world”

The idea of contacting the dead was often mocked in illustrations by satirists, like this one in humour magazine *Fliegende Blätter*, 1907

Séances gained popularity with the introduction of Spiritualism, a religion founded by Kate and Margaret Fox

Photographers used to charge séance-goers to have their picture taken with the ghost of a loved one

The séance of Mary Todd Lincoln, during which she tried to contact her son, became one of the most notorious ever held





Hitler and the occult

The runes, rituals and star signs behind the rise and fall of the Third Reich

Written by James Hoare

The Nazis were desperate," intones John Hurt's Professor Bruttenholm in Guillermo del Toro's 2004 dark fantasy film and comic adaptation, *Hellboy*.

"Combining science and black magic, they intended to upset the balance of the war."

From the box office to bookshelves, the image of Nazi Germany being in league with black magic and old gods is ubiquitous. Though best characterized by the retro pulp of the *Indiana Jones* film series where the adventurous archaeologist races to keep relics from the pursuing jackboots, it's a far more long-lived trope than you might think.

A handful of early texts advanced the theory during the early days of World War II. *Hitler Speaks* (1939) by Hermann Rauschning, *Occult Causes of the Present War* (1940) by Lewis Spence and *Hitler et les Forces Occultes* (*Hitler at the Occult Forces*, 1939) by Edouard Saby all portrayed the Führer as a man driven by the demonic forces he could barely contain to one degree or another.

None of these writers had any exclusive insider knowledge of the inner workings of the Nazi

Party. Rauschning leveraged his credibility as a former middle-ranking Nazi to greatly embellish his contact and conversations with Hitler. Spence was a Scottish folklorist and writer who projected his own occult knowledge onto the mystical manifestos of Hitler's fellow travellers. Saby was even further gone, seeing evidence of occult hand gestures in the Führer's photographs and equating vegetarianism with Satanism.

Facts that thin soon gave way to fiction and Dennis Wheatley wrote the supernatural thriller *Strange Conflict* in 1941, which told of Nazi witch doctors menacing the Atlantic convoys from South America. The Stephen King of his day, Wheatley rubbed velvet shoulders with English occultists such as Aleister Crowley and Montague Summers, and spent the war working for the London Controlling Section, a part of the byzantine British intelligence apparatus concerned with elaborate deception campaigns.

After the war ended, Wheatley's novels *They Used Dark Forces* (1964) and *Gateway to Hell* (1970) helped to keep the concept in the public imagination, leading to the first *Indiana Jones* movie, *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981), and from

that into an endless parade of Nazi zombie movies and credulous cable shows exploring the Third Reich's myriad magical mysteries.

Why these stories endured then and why they endure now is largely the same. In 1939-40, the seemingly unstoppable advance of Nazi Germany as it rolled over its neighbours was difficult to understand without recourse to dark powers. In the aftermath of World War II, the horrific scale of the Holocaust, the devastation of aerial bombardment and the savagery of occupation defied easy understanding. Again, many took comfort in the belief that this wasn't the work of people just like themselves, but of monsters whose dark appetites drove them to seek out forbidden lore.

At its heart, though, is a kernel of truth and interest in the esoteric was surprisingly widespread in Nazi Germany. While the idea of a gimlet-eyed Führer driven by occult obsessions is absolute rubbish, the occult was indelibly bound up with Nazi Germany. It was a low hum of astrology, superstition, runes and mythology that underpinned 12 years in which the swastika fluttered above Berlin.

The twilight of reason

The spiritualists and secret societies at the birth of the Nazis

Across Europe and North America, the turn of the century represented the flowering of superstitious thought. This was the product of spiritual anxiety – people felt lost in this unstable new world and nowhere was this more obvious than in Germany.

Hot on the heels of their seemingly incomprehensible defeat in World War I came the economic mismanagement and political instability of the Weimar Republic, bringing with it running street battles between far left and far right, and hyperinflation – an unnecessary head start for the race to the bottom that was the Great Depression. What granted this febrile atmosphere a uniquely dangerous quality was the burgeoning relationship

between nationalism, anti-Semitism and supernatural superstitions.

Still a new country with myriad dialects and regional identities, significant Slavic and Jewish minorities and a volatile confessional faultline between the Protestant north and the Catholic south, Germany had only become unified under one flag in 1871, while Austria remained part of the 'German world' but not a part of the country itself. In short, the question of what it was to be 'German' hadn't really been resolved.

The soundtrack to this combative nationalism was undoubtedly Richard Wagner. In 1869, the first part of what would become his epic *Der Ring des*

★ "To be German you had to be descended from this pre-industrial pagan idyll that their cherry-picking of history had contrived"

NSDAP propaganda from 1932 depicts Communism as a supernatural foe



Nibelungen (*The Ring of Nibelungen*) was staged in Munich. Conceived as a break from the Italian style operas of his earlier career, *Nibelungen* crafted a new shared mythology out of pre-Christian Norse and Germanic folktales. Although widely admired, amid these thunderous chords was plenty that the emerging German far right could embrace: a heroic masculine ideal overcoming duplicitous foes, spiritual purity versus greedy materialism, and sheer bloody righteousness.

Another spiritual bonding agent for this fractured nation was the völkisch movement that emerged over the 19th century, emphasising the spiritual purity of German peasant life and folklore that had become corrupted by urbanisation and Christianity. For völkisch thinkers, theirs was an exclusive creed: Blut und Boden (Blood and Soil). German soil and German blood were linked, and to be German you had to be descended from this pre-industrial pagan idyll that their cherry-picking of history had contrived.

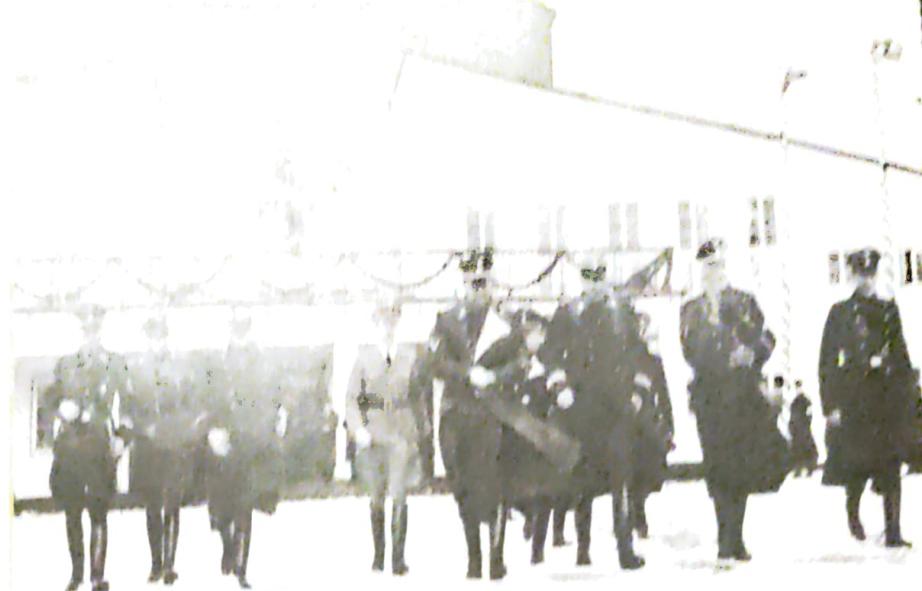
In 1903, the hoary Austrian occultist Guido von List (and his acolyte Jörg Lanz von Liebenfels) popularized a new theory that bound this sense of longing and bubbling hatred into a potent new form: Ariosophy, or Armanism. An active contributor to völkisch journals on the subject of ancient runes (he created the 18-letter Armanen Futharkh later used by the SS) and his own Odin-worshipping cult, List believed that all the great figures in history and legend were Aryans whose golden age had been ended by the onset of inferior races and cultures.

List and Liebenfels identified Atlantis – an object of particular fascination for 19th-century occultists – with the mythical North Atlantic island civilisation of Thule, postulating that the ancient Aryans had been scattered from there following a catastrophic flood, with the purest bloodlines of this spiritual Aryan super race settling in Germany and the Himalayas.

Now German meant Aryan, and those of insufficient 'Aryan blood' – Jews and Slavs, for example – were seen as an existential threat to the völk. Purely by existing, völkisch fanatics believed that these 'lesser races' were poisoning the sacred union of their ancient culture and land. This broiling stew of heroic mythology that followed Wagner, the imagined pagan past and virulent racism of the völkisch movement, and myriad other occult fascinations that bloomed in this hothouse of unreason – from numerology and astrology to dowsing rods and homeopathy – were the engine that drove a significant chunk of the German right. Crucially, these strands of thought electrified many who would go on to take their place by Hitler's side following his seizure of power in 1933.



The sword in Hitler's hand on this cover of German newspaper *Die Woche* links to Wagner's operas



Many high-ranking members of the Nazi Party believed in the idea of Blut und Boden: 'Blood and Soil'



Blut und Boden called for rural values and the preserving of farming communities

Deputy Führer Rudolf Hess and the notorious governor general of occupied Poland, Hans Frank, were both members of the Thule Society, which grew out of the obscure völkisch Germanenorden (German Order) and Reichshammerbund (Reich Hammer Association). Frustrated by their lack of electoral success, the Thule Society entrusted right-wing journalist Karl Harrer with the task of shearing their hateful creed of its occult tics and taking it to the working class. The result was the Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (German Worker's Party), co-founded in 1919 by Harrer and Dietrich Eckart.

As the DAP transitioned to the NSDAP (Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei, or the National Socialist German Worker's Party) in 1920 under charismatic new frontman and Eckart protégé Adolf Hitler, they broke their links with the Thule Society and booted out Harrer, having drawn away members, support and even the official newspaper, *Völkischer Beobachter* (People's Observer) from their one-time sponsors.

Minister of Food Richard Walther Darré, Auschwitz commandant Rudolf Höss, Hitlerjungend (Hitler Youth) leader Baldur von

Schirach and Reichsführer SS Heinrich Himmler all met in the extreme völkisch Artaman League, which formed in 1923. The Artaman preached a retreat from cities and Christianity, and into farmsteads and solstice festivals. They looked to Eastern Europe for "German soil" to "reclaim" and violently opposed the Slavic presence in Germany's ethnically mixed eastern borderlands. Like the Thule Society, the League was soon swallowed up by the rise of NSDAP and by 1927, an estimated 80 per cent of their membership had joined Hitler.

While in the grand scheme of Weimar Germany's tempestuous political scene the likes of the Thule Society and the Artaman League were little more than racist social clubs for middle-class dilettantes, the NSDAP was a mass movement that spoke to the fears of the German working class. It promised jobs, stability, economic good times, victory over enemies within and without and a new world on their own terms. It may have been couched in the rhetoric of good versus evil, destiny and the völk - describing Jewish people in the terminology of the vampire and Hitler



A pagan shrine in Germany for those following the Norse gods

in the language of the saviour - but these were subordinate to political realities.

Hitler himself had very little contact with the occult fringes of the German far right and, indeed, esoteric sects began to be shut down from 1933 and the more outspoken activists "völkisch wandering scholars", in Hitler's own words were silenced.

For the Führer, the supernatural was a prop, a way of encapsulating and manipulating that desire for something better, stronger, more self-assured that many ordinary Germans felt at the time. He embraced the imagery of Wagner, seeing himself as his heroic protagonist Siegfried, and identified with the archetype of the 'magician' or the 'prophet' - but these were costumes to be worn on the political stage.

Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung best encapsulated the supernatural aura of Hitler's presentation, saying in 1942: "He is the loudspeaker which magnifies the inaudible whispers of the German soul until they can be heard by the German's conscious ear [...] Hitler's power is not political, it is magic."

Fortune tellers & the Third Reich

Nazi Germany never really settled on an official position when it came to astrology, and that started right at the top

The dream quest of Rudolf Hess

Pushed to the fringes of the Third Reich and anxious about the coming war with the Soviet Union, Hess set upon the idea of a desperate peace mission to Britain that would put him back in the Führer's good graces.

With his astrologer Ernst Schulte Strathaus having advised him of the optimum departure date for a mission of peace, on 10 May 1941—just over a month before the start of Operation Barbarossa—Hess set off alone on a night flight to Scotland in his personal Messerschmitt Bf 110. Crash landing and taken into custody, British intelligence quickly realized that not only were Hess' pleas for peace a cheque that couldn't be cashed, but the Deputy Führer himself wasn't entirely stable. Over the long incarceration that followed, Hess raged that his food was been poisoned, attempted suicide and admitted that the idea for his flight had come to him in a dream.

Back in Berlin, Hitler was furious. Egged on by Bormann and Rosenberg, who blamed the advice of astrologers for this betrayal, Hitler authorised the 'Hess Action'. On 9 June 1941, Heydrich began a mass round-up of astrologers, psychics and faith healers. Hundreds were arrested, thousands of occult books seized and Schulte Strathaus disappeared into a concentration camp for two years.

Much to the frustration of Rosenberg, Heydrich put the focus on re-education, a relatively benign response given the wanton terror that the Gestapo had visited on the other ideological enemies of the Reich. Many of those interned were eventually released. Either Heydrich had given up pushing against Himmler's indulgence of the supernatural, or, with the impending war in the east, he simply felt the resources of the Reich Main Security Office were better spent elsewhere.



RUDOLF HESS

DEPUTY FÜHRER
(1933-4)

One of Hitler's most devoted early followers, Hess became increasingly marginalized and outmanoeuvred by more accomplished political big beasts, including his own secretary. The Deputy Führer allegedly used a pendulum to decide whether letters were sent by allies or enemies and regularly solicited advice from astrologers.

The most prolific patron of occultists in Nazi Germany, Himmler relied upon his personal astrologer Wilhelm Wulff so heavily towards the end of the war that Walter Schellenberg, chief of SD-Ausland (foreign intelligence), found it easier to seek orders from the "court magician" than the "king".



HEINRICH HIMMLER

REICHSPÜHLER-SS
(1929-45)

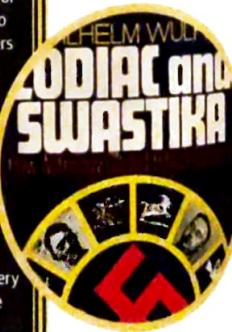
The stars are our secret weapon

With secret British innovations such as radar, sonar and Bletchley Park codebreaking turning the tables on the German U-boat menace in the Atlantic, the German Navy was at a loss to explain this reversal of fortunes. Inevitably, superstition flourished in ignorance and, at the suggestion of U-boat captain Hans Roeder, the MND (Marine Nachrichten Dienst; Naval Intelligence Service) authorised the establishment of the Pendulum Institute in Berlin.

Roeder's rogues gallery included the likes of Karl Krafft, briefly released from prison for the job, astrologer Wilhelm Wulff and dowser Ludwig Straniak. This was the first officially sanctioned use of authentic astrology in the Third Reich (Goebbels wasn't genuinely soliciting horoscopes, after all), but it wouldn't be the last. When the navy eventually lost patience in the Pendulum Institute, many of its beneficiaries found work with the SS. Wulff in particular would claim to be at the heart of an unlikely tale: Operation Mars.

By August 1943, Benito Mussolini had been overthrown and imprisoned by the Italian government, who were looking for an early exit from the war. Retrieving the deposed dictator was of paramount importance to keeping fascist Italy fighting and so Himmler ordered around 40 astrologers, diviners and dowsters to be released from concentration camps and put to work in a villa conjuring the defeated dictator's whereabouts. Their prize would be freedom plus a million Reichsmarks, but swapping the cruel camp regime for Himmler's luxurious pile was more than enough.

Eventually, though, Mussolini was located and retrieved in a daring mission led by the infamous Otto Skorzeny on 12 September 1943. Himmler was overjoyed with the tremendous success of Operation Mars and, although the intelligence gathering behind the successful operation was very much the traditional kind, nobody had it in them to convince him otherwise.



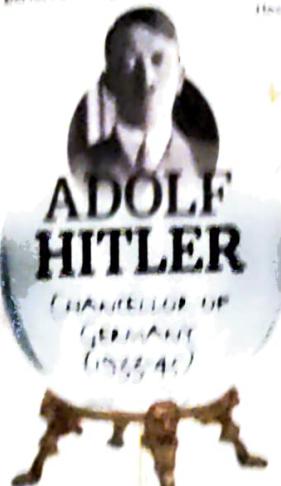
BELIEVERS



"Gaddafi's propaganda team, a team of astrophysicists, could influence public opinion on his behalf."

Hospital testing infrastructure is often not expandable enough to handle large numbers of patients. This is often a problem because of staff and equipment issues within the hospital environment. It is also an increasingly influential political issue, often considered by local and state politicians for the sake of the community or health care providers.

1860 PREDICTION



ADOLF HITLER

MANUFACTURED BY
G. E. L. AND CO.
(1922 AD.)



through sympathetic or the power of
superstition to regularise a leader
either claimed or known as inferior
in astrology. Speaking in July 1933
the Hitlerites declared: "Although
our principles may be wrong
a hundred times, they are
principally important, a culture, for our
principles to be historically confirmed
by subsequent events. For it is the
beloved, idealised and heralded dream
from generation to generation."



Phasmatoptera
Experiments with
fertilizers

卷之三

The legislative programme
involved further publishing
legislation of proposed
parts of legislation, including
further proposed public legislation
being laid before parliament, the
revised *Charter of Liberties* being
submitted. This was a part
of the proposed
programme that was not
fully implemented, although
the new *Charter of Liberties* is often
referred to as having
been published.



*Director of the Geographical
Survey of India*
*Director of the Royal
Mint Surveyor Royal
(1852-53)*

Hayek was tested with shifting dream casts, mystics, and fortune tellers who represented a threat to Nazi orthodoxy; a treasonous needs map compiled by Hitler, who encouraged him to police the arbitrary distinction between scientific and fraudulent methodologies. Many of those pursued by the SS (such as Hayek) believe the intelligence wing of the SS or Gestapo would feel protection under

↳ [Bereitstellung von Figuren, Texten, Bildern, Tabelle, Formularen](#)

Predict for victory

Defying the ban on predictions involving the Reich leader ship, the Swiss-born astrologer Karl Kraft sent an urgent letter to a friend with 95 constellations warning that Hitler's life was in danger between 7 and 10 November 1939, when the Führer narrowly escaped a bomb by mistake on 8 November. Kraft was hunted by the Gestapo as a potential accomplice. Eventually they released him, convinced the apparent foreknowledge was nothing sinister.

Görbke, though, was fascinated by the fact that the British had begun broadcasting astro-horoscopes to erode the confidence of the German public. Görbke began building a team of astrologers who could influence public opinion on his behalf. Kraft took center stage as work began on pamphlets based around reinterpreting the 16th century prophecies of Nostradamus to trumpet a preordained German victory and spread them across Europe.

Gosbels was delighted, writing triumphantly of the fatality that his work was going to France, but Kraft's self-respect was bruised. He grew increasingly belligerent and was unwilling to toe the line and compromise on his craft, as he saw it. He resigned, although his work continued to be praised regardless of his wishes, and Gosbels' team of tame astrologers produced hundreds of books, pamphlets and radio broadcasts until 1945, falsely convinced that the British public were as enthralled by astrology as their German counterparts.

Out from under the protection of the Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda Kraft fell firmly back under the crosshairs of the Gestapo and, unable to keep his mouth shut about the fluid

Reich's chances as the stars relayed them to him, he was picked up to the Hess Action. In and out of prisons and concentration camps for the rest of the war, Krafft eventually died of typhus on 8 January 1945 while in a barracks at Buchenwald.



The dark culture of the SS

Himmler's state-within-a-state was filled with outlandish occultists and projects

Heinrich Himmler's political upbringing in the esoteric Armanen League permeated his many endeavours. Once he was handed control of the Schutzstaffel (Protection Squad) responsible for the security of the party's elite in 1929, he set about transforming the SS from bloody knuckled, Weimar era street brawlers into a militant order inspired by the Teutonic Knights who brought Germanic sword and fire to the dark forests and mountains of the Baltic.

While most of Himmler's occult predilections initially played out behind closed doors, in one way at least it was worn on his sleeve. SS insignia, from the infamous double lightning flash to the emblems of various units and formations, came from Guido von List's runic alphabet.

As wider German society became steadily hostile to the more maverick mystics, Himmler welcomed them with open arms and set them to work. The Ahnenerbe, more properly the Forschungs- und Lehrgemeinschaft das Ahnenerbe (Ancestral Research and Teaching Society) was formed under a different name in 1935, before being gradually absorbed into the SS.

Concerned with research into the mythic origins of Aryans and recovering or recreating their knowledge, the Ahnenerbe ballooned into a vast apparatus with departments covering research areas as niche as Hausmarken und Sippenzeichen (House Brands and Family Marks), Wurtenforschung (Dwelling Mound Research), Indogermanische Rechtsgeschichte (Indogermanic

Historical Jurisprudence) and Volksverzählung, Märchen und Sagenkunde (Folktales, Fairytales and Myths). Unsurprisingly, its manager Walther Stevener was a veteran of the Armanen League.

Perhaps its most sensationalist endeavour, though, was the 1938-39 expedition to Tibet. A far-finding trip into the spurious shared heritage of the other 'pure' Aryan culture to have survived the catastrophic sinking of Atlantis/Thule, its leader, the square-jawed Bear Grylls of Nazi Germany, Ernst Schäfer, consulted Himmler's mystic mentor Karl Maria Wiligut before his departure. He left convinced that Wiligut had read his mind using techniques only known to the Tibetan lamas.

The expedition was a masterpiece in confirmation bias as Schäfer's team – who held a

Join the Ahnenerbe, see the world!

ICELAND (1938)

Linguist Bruno Schwyzer led an expedition looking for shrines to Odin and Thor. He found the Icelandic government uncooperative and complained to Himmler that the Icelandic people had abandoned their traditional crafts and legends.

FINLAND (1936)

Finnish anthropologist Yrjö von Giornhagen led a joint German-Finnish voyage through the remote region of Karelia to record the chants of witches.

CANARY ISLANDS (1939)

Historian Herman Wirth thought vintage accounts of Canary Islanders with blonde hair made the island a possible contender for Thule. The trip was called off when war was declared.

BOLIVIA (1939)

Another expedition canned by war, archaeologist Edmund Kiss believed the ruined temples of the Andes were similar to European structures suggesting that they were the work of ancient Aryans.

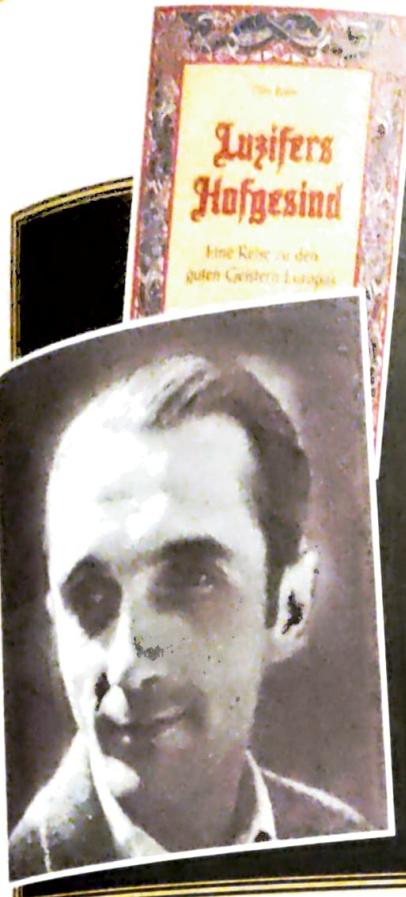
ANTARCTICA (1938-39)

Fuel for conspiracy theorists, the Ahnenerbe were sent to the remote German-claimed New Swabia to drop swastika flags against a Norwegian claim.

The Rasputin of the Reich

By Himmler's side from late 1933 to his retirement in summer 1939 aged 72 was Karl Maria Wiligut. A one-time Austrian asylum patient, although the SS kept records of his mental health tightly under wraps lest they expose their boss to ridicule, Wiligut claimed direct descent from a line of prehistoric German sages created by a coupling of Asen (air) and Wanen (water) gods – the Aesir and Vanir in Norse mythology.

Along with the ancient rites he had inherited from his father and his father's father, Wiligut boasted of a "clairvoyant memory" that allowed him to channel ancestral wisdom. In one particularly lurid incident, he was driving with Himmler when suddenly he began to fit. Foaming at the mouth, he lurched from the car and into a nearby field. Lucid again, Wiligut announced that this was a site sacred to the ancient Germans.



Raider of the lost grail

A passionate historian of Medieval grail lore often referred to as the "real Indiana Jones", Otto Rahn was lured into the SS inner circle by Willigut on the strength of his widely read 1933 book *Kreuzzug gegen den Gral* (Crusade Towards the Grail), which spread the idea that the 13th-century Cathar heresy was in fact the remnants of a Germanic pagan cult.

Rahn was particularly taken with accounts of three Cathar knights slipping over the walls of the doomed Montsegur Castle with the Holy Grail—the cup used to catch the blood of Christ at his crucifixion, believed by Rahn to be a pre-Christian relic that fell from the sky—hidden in a sack and travelled to the Languedoc region of southern France to explore the subterranean passages used by the Cathars.

Himmler loved Rahn's work so much he committed it to memory and signed off a 1,000-Reichsmark a month stipend for Rahn to work on his next book. Rahn took on SS rank and uniform to better ingratiate himself with his new patrons. As an openly gay man he should have been on his guard, but his obsession with finding the Holy Grail blinded him to all else. Only when his 'sequel'

Luzifers Hofgesind (Lucifer's Court) appeared in 1937 with anti-Semitic passages crudely inserted by another hand, did Rahn perhaps realize the monster that his efforts were feeding. Himmler, for his part, was delighted with *Lucifer's Court*, which linked the Cathar heresy to wider witchcraft cults through the figure of Lucifer—the Devil here a pagan bringer of light demonized by the Christian Church, and ordered 5,000 copies bound in leather to be presented to the Nazi elite. Hitler was even given one for his birthday.

Punished for a drunken scrape with a three-month tour of duty on the staff of Dachau concentration camp, Rahn was horrified by what he saw and naively tried to resign his commission. Rumours of his sexuality and possible Jewish heritage were beginning to make the rounds.

While stories vary on the exact chain of events, some say his resignation was refused and a solution that better suited the Reichsführer-SS was proposed. Either way, in March 1939, 34-year-old Rahn climbed a snow-covered slope in Austria's Tyrol mountains and was found dead the following morning, his lifeless eyes staring out across the serene landscape.

winter solstice rite when they arrived—returned laden down with artifacts and holy books, convinced of the shared Aryan heritage of National Socialism and the Tibetan Buddhism.

So pleased was Himmler with the scope and scale of his organisation's output that he presented Hitler with a set of leather-bound volumes recording the great Ahnenerbe discoveries on his 50th birthday.

Despite the all-consuming growth of Ahnenerbe, Himmler's voracious hunger for occultish knowledge also led to the eye-catching Hexen-Sonderauftrag (Special Assignment—Witches), or H-Sonderkommando (H-Special unit), which ultimately found itself concerned with cataloguing lore and artifacts relating to witch trials and hunts.

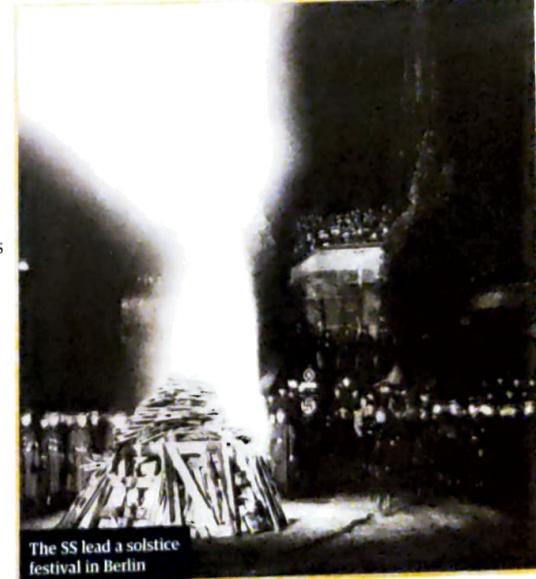
They managed to fill a detailed library of reference cards—the Hexenkartotheke—with accounts of lusty Germanic pagans facing off against the feeble-minded Church. Despite having some overlapping areas of interest, they avoided being absorbed by the Ahnenerbe by 'discovering' that Himmler was a direct descendent of Margaret Hambler, a woman who was burnt alive as a witch in 1629.

It's important to remember that this seemingly ridiculous obsession with chronicling an imagined past of magical rituals and storybook heroes was part of an ideology of unrivalled venom and intent. Himmler's genocidal campaign in the wake of Operation Barbarossa—cleansing the east of Jews, Roma and Sinti, communists and a bloody swathe of the Slavic population in preparation for German

colonists—was a dark dream drawn from his days in the Artaman League. As custodians of Aryan superiority whose work fed the ideological engine that drove the Holocaust, the Ahnenerbe found themselves on the front line.

Archaeologist Hans Schleif was given custody of Ahnenerbe's activities in occupied Poland, plundering Polish treasures from the Warsaw Archaeological Museum and looting Jewish homes in the country. The anthropologist from the Tibet expedition, Bruno Beger, procured skeletons for racial categorisation, selecting an estimated 100 prisoners from concentration camps for murder and study. Finally, folklorist Alfred Karasek took control of the resettlement of Germans in Ukraine and ultimately became an active participant in mass murder and population clearance.

"As custodians of Aryan superiority whose work fed the ideological engine that drove the Holocaust, the Ahnenerbe found themselves on the frontline"



The SS lead a solstice festival in Berlin



Ernst Schäfer during the Tibetan expedition

Himmler's Nazi Camelot

Inside Wewelsburg castle, the SS's monument to mysticism

With the SS increasingly retreating into a world of its own, distinct even from the collective madness of the Third Reich, Himmler hit upon the 17th-century Wewelsburg Castle in Westphalia as the perfect inner sanctum for his unholy order.

The castle was soon appropriated for the ideological indoctrination of the SS Race and Settlement Office in 1934 under the esoteric influence of Willigut Himmler. He began to envisage it as a tribute to Henry the Fowler, a 10th-century German ruler reimagined by Wagner in his opera *Lohengrin* as the first great pan-Germanic hero, uniting the nation against the Hungarians. Himmler believed himself to be the reincarnation of Henry.

While Himmler's lieutenants held pseudo pagans, celebrating weddings and solstices alike in an imagined Germanic tradition, millions of Reichsmarks were sunk into renovating the castle. A concentration camp was opened nearby to provide a labour force and the Ahnenerbe became glorified interior designers as rooms were named after great German rulers and filled with related artwork, artifacts and armour, stolen and bought.

The castle's two showstopping features were testament to Himmler's mythic pretensions: a pseudo-Arthurian round table for the SS elite and a vast hall, the floor adorned with a jagged 'black sun' that glorified in the deeds of dead SS-Gruppenfuehrer (SS-group leaders), who would be

ritually cremated and stored in one of ten urns in the vault below.

Similarly, the personalized SS-Ehrenring (SS honor rings, also called Totenkopfringe, or 'death's head rings'), designed to signal membership of the inner circle of Himmler's order, were returned here for storage upon the owners' death, creating an eternal brotherhood linked in death as they were in life by the twisted ideals of the genocidal Schutzstaffel.

Plans compiled across 1940 and 1942, set aside as the tide of war turned against the Third Reich, provide for the entire relocation of the nearby village and a vast complex spilling out over half a mile on a wheel of towers and curtain walls.

In 1945, as the US Army advanced, Himmler ordered Wewelsburg to be razed rather than see his sacred temple profaned. In the end, it was only partly destroyed but damaged enough to inspire mystery and invite questions that cannot be easily answered. Wewelsburg became a subject of fascination in the 1970s, a Nazi 'Camelot' of occult mysteries and secretive rituals.

"Millions of Reichsmarks were sunk into renovating and redecorating the castle"

The Black Sun

Now nearly as potent in its toxicity as the swastika, the black sun wasn't widely used by the Third Reich, appearing only on the floor of Wewelsburg's 'hall of heroes'. Composed of a sunwheel—one of the traditional symbols of Germanic paganism—and 12 single sig runes radiating outwards, the black sun was an astrological body whose power, according to Himmler's occult mentor, Karl Maria Wiligut, could be harnessed through yoga.



Honor among thieves

Designed by Willigut and initially presented only to senior officers, the SS-Ehrenring was a personal gift from Himmler and signified the bearer's membership of an elite within the SS. It was to be worn on the left hand ring finger and returned upon death, dismissal or retirement.



Oak leaves

A feature on older Prussian military decorations, oak leaves symbolised regeneration and were incorporated into the Knight's Cross medal and onto gravestones during the Third Reich to displace Christian imagery.



Sig rune

A single lightning bolt in a triangle, symbolising victory from which we get the Nazi salute 'Sieg Heil' or 'Heil Victory'.

All that glitters

As well as being silver, SS-Ehrenring are rare. According to rumour, the castle's stock of honor rings—around 9,280—were sealed in a nearby cave with dynamite, capturing the imagination of treasure hunters for over half a century.

Inscription

The recipient's name, Himmler's signature and the date it was awarded were engraved on the interior of the ring.

Totenkopf rune

The 'death's head' of the SS, symbolising, of course, death or valour in the face of death. Like the oak leaves, it was also used by the Prussian army.

Weird War II

Some of the most headline-grabbing projects attributed to the Nazis are simply nonsense

SECRET MAP TO THE GRAIL SEIZED

Hitler's henchmen loot the Ghent Altarpiece

Hubert and Jan van Eyck's 15th-century *Adoration of the Mystic Lamb* often referred to as the Ghent Altarpiece for its pride of place at Ghent Cathedral, is one of the most important pieces of Christian artwork in Europe and Hitler had to have it. One key panel shows a lamb bleeding into the Holy Grail, signifying the elaborate polyptych's true role—

a secret map to the sacred vessel. Hitler's interest in the Ghent Altarpiece was political as well as artistic. Aside from being a work he hugely admired, it was one of the artworks returned to Belgium in the

Treaty of Versailles and he felt it rightfully belonged to the Reich.



UNHOLY HITLER WIELDS HOLY LANCE

It pierced the side of Christ and led Adolf to victory

The fabled Spear of Longinus, reputed to have pierced the side of Christ at the Crucifixion, was seized from Vienna's treasury by the Nazis during the Anschluss. Hitler used its otherworldly powers, harnessed by the great German warrior kings of the past, to steamroller most of Europe.

The story surfaced in a 1972 book by Trevor Ravenscroft, who claimed to have studied under Austrian occultist and Grail writer Walter Stein. It later transpired the two had never met and Ravenscroft contacted Stein after his death in a seance. Meanwhile, Vienna's Hofburg Spear dates from the 7th century CE—well after its cameo in the New Testament.



World News

HISTORY • POLITICS • SPIRIT • SOCIAL • LOCAL • WEATHER • CURRENT AFFAIRS



THE DEVIL INSIDE DER FÜHRER

Adolf Hitler's evil inspired by demonic possession

Surely acts that murderous could only come from Lucifer himself? Former far-right politician Hermann Rauschning's 1939 biography of the Führer paints a troubling portrait of a man plagued by demonic voices. Hitler himself underlined "He who does not have the demonic seed within himself will never give birth to a magical world" in his personal copy of Ernst

Schertel's *Magic History, Theory and Practice*.

Rauschning embellished his contact with Hitler considerably, publishing his book to meet the growing interest in Germany's new master. As for the "demon seed", Hitler's enthusiasm for Schertel was purely symbolic: a magician was someone who changed the world through sheer force of will.

MAGICIAN MENTORS A MONSTER

Aleister Crowley fed the Führer hallucinogens and taught him everything he knew



Crowley's magical manifesto *The Book of the Law* was translated into German in 1925, catching the eye of Adolf Hitler. Translator Martha Kuntzel observed the similarities between the text and Hitler's own declaration of dark faith. *Mein Kampf*, Crowley tried to contact Hitler around 1930 to induct him into Thelema and he annotated a copy of Kuntzel's 1939 book *Hitler Speaks with the Commonality*.

In reality, this bromance was all rather one-sided. There's no evidence that Hitler was aware of Crowley's writings, and by the time *The Book of the Law* was released in Germany, the future Führer's worldview was firmly established.

HISTORY of the Occult

Future PLC Quay House, The Ambury, Bath, BA1 1UA

Editorial

Editor **Charles Ginger**
Senior Art Editor **Stephen Williams**
Head of Art & Design **Greg Whittaker**
Editorial Director **Jon White**

Cover Images

Alamy, Getty Images

Photography

All copyrights and trademarks are recognised and respected

Advertising

Media packs are available on request
Commercial Director **Clare Dove**

International

Head of Print Licensing **Rachel Shaw**
licensing@futurenet.com
www.futurecontenthub.com

Circulation

Head of Neovrade **Tim Mather**

Production

Head of Production **Mark Considine**
Production Project Manager **Matthew Spinton**
Advertising Production Manager **Joanne Crosby**
Digital Editions Controller **Jason Hudson**
Production Managers **Kesly Miller, Mata Coady, Vivienne Calvert, Fran Twentyman**

Printed in the UK

Distributed by Marketforce, 5 Churchill Place, Canary Wharf, London, E14 5HU
www.marketforce.co.uk - For enquiries, please email:
mcommunications@futurenet.com

History of the Occult

© 2023 Future Publishing Limited

We are committed to only using magazine paper which is derived from responsibly managed, certified forests and sustainable sources. The paper in this magazine was sourced and produced from sustainable managed forests, conforming to strict environmental and
social standards.

All contents © 2023 Future Publishing Limited or published under licence. All rights reserved.
No part of this magazine may be used, stored, transmitted or reproduced in any way without
the prior written permission of the publisher. Future Publishing Limited (company number
2006886) is registered in England and Wales. Registered Office: Quay House, The Ambury,
Bath BA1 1UA. All information contained in this publication is for information only and is not
intended to substitute for the advice of a qualified medical professional. You are advised to consult a medical professional
or physician before commencing any treatment. You are advised to read the instructions and
indications for use referred to the product or service referred to in this publication. All
rights reserved. Any publications not under our control, whilst not responsible for
their content, may be subject to any legal action to which the publications mentioned herein
and their authors may be entitled in any way with the companies mentioned herein.

FUTURE

Connectors.
Creators.
Experience
Makers.

Future Publishing
UK & International
Editorial, Art & Design
Editorial Office: Bath
www.futurenet.com

Chief Executive Officer: Ben Thompson
Non-Executive Chairman: Richard Thompson
Chief Financial Officer: Penny Lister-Brown

UK Office: Quay House, The Ambury, Bath BA1 1UA
T: +44 (0)1225 442444

US Office: 355 Blair Road, Avenel, NJ 07001, USA
T: +1 732 566 4900

Other International Offices: Berlin, Hong Kong, London, Madrid, Paris, Sydney, Tokyo, Vienna

www.futurenet.com

Printed in the UK by Pensord Printers Ltd, Monmouthshire, Gwent, South Wales

www.pensordprinters.co.uk

Printed on 100% Recycled Paper

Printed on 10

History of the Occult

Uncover arcane knowledge and enigmatic occultists



The magical life of Aleister Crowley

Aleister Crowley, notorious writer, poet, ceremonial magician, occultist, and spokesman for the techniques of the occult, had a life filled with scandal and controversy. From his days as a student to his rise as a spiritual leader, Crowley's life was a mix of mystery and magic.

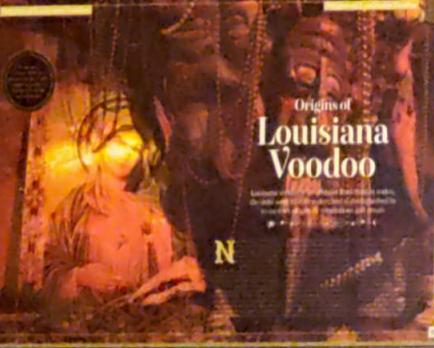


Renaissance magic

The 'Book of Hours' and 'Book of Hours' of King Henry VIII, which contain some of the most famous and mysterious illustrations of the period, are explored in this article. The 'Book of Hours' of King Henry VIII, which contain some of the most famous and mysterious illustrations of the period, are explored in this article.

Infamous occultists

Unveil the true stories of the occult's most influential leaders and prophets



Origins of Louisiana Voodoo

Learn about the history of voodoo in America, from its roots in West African cultures to its influence on modern pop culture. The article also explores the life of the voodoo queen, Marie Laveau, and her impact on New Orleans.

Origins of voodoo

Discover how voodoo came to America and what it takes to become a voodoo queen

Magic & discoveries

Explore how attitudes to magic, superstition and science have changed throughout history



Hitler and the occult

The article explores the Nazi leader's fascination with the occult and his belief in the power of magic. It also looks at the role of the occult in the Nazi regime, from the use of voodoo in concentration camps to the creation of the 'Book of the Dead'.

Runes of the Reich

Find out why Hitler and his evil cronies became obsessed with the otherworldly